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salt in the wound

WARNING

this fanfiction, as a warrior cat's book, contains murder, gore, and death. if you aren't comfortable with these topics, please click away.

CREDITS

this stemmed from a plot prompt by LunaTheMoonWolf10 , but the characters, title, clans and plot belong to me. the general idea of warrior cats belongs to the erin hunter team, and although i did create the cover, the photo on the cover doesn't belong to me.

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"a cat from the past seeks revenge,"

SALT IN THE WOUND

"their fallen future they want to avenge."

BY

"blood and tears, they're willing to shed,"

LILY [_patches]

"until their warrior ancestors are once again dead."

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hello!! my name's lily, and welcome to salt in the wound! i ran across LunaTheMoonWolf10 's plot prompt book the other day and was instantly inspired! i haven't felt this kind of motivation in a long time, so i kind of just jumped right into it. thus, i only have a general idea of how i'd like this fanfic to go, so please bear with me here.

also! this book used to be a fanfic called in another life, which was from a warrior cat's plot book and was a *completely* different plot. i

published, unpublished, and just ended up scraping that idea entirely, so the comments you see may be from in another life, and therefore might make little sense.

okay, enough talking! happy reading!

~ lily

thunderclan

"i am no warrior, but i am a thunderclan cat."

"thunderclan warriors don't kill unless they have to."

"there is no clan in the forest so true or so brave."

WELCOME TO THUNDERCLAN

i'm certain everyone knows what thunderclan is, but for those that don't, here's a quick explanation!

thunderclan cats live primarily in woodland, and in the warrior cats series, they're the clan that typically tries to keep peace, order, and make wise decisions. they're often the ones that take in loner and kittypets, and are seen as more open-minded compared to the other clans. they can climb trees, and are strong; when entering battle, they often charge in, creating the idea of "thunder".

now for the plot of the story, this will take place *way* after everything that's happened in the main warrior series. that means there will be skyclan, and it will be the lake territory! i'm not super caught up with the newer warrior cat books (i stopped reading after the broken codes arc, which if i'm being honest i don't remember very well) so this probably won't be super cannon accurate!

prologue

nonbeliever

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EVEN AT HER YOUNG AGE, Violetkit knew something was wrong. Her mother Blossomsky's expression was always worried, her father Russetfrost would often appear in the nursery to whisper something rapidly in Blossomsky's ear, and she never saw her sister, Honeykit, anymore. Now, Honeykit spent her days in the medicine den.

Violetkit didn't know exactly *what* was wrong. She and her brother, Sunkit, would often try and get an answer out of their parents, of why they always looked so upset and why Honeykit never slept in the nursery. But Blossomsky would just distract them or gently shoo them away.

"I wish they'd tell me the issue," Violetkit complained to her best friend, Swankit, one sunny greenleaf afternoon, twitching her white-and-ginger-striped pelt uneasily. "Then I could help."

Swankit rolled the moss ball over to Violetkit. "Warriors are like that, they never tell us anything," she declared, blue eyes gleaming. "They're *horrible*. When I'm a warrior, I'll share everything with *my* kits."

The ginger-and-white she-cat purred at her friend's words. "Oh, will you?" she teased. "And just who do you plan on having those kits with?"

"With Frostpaw, of course!" Swankit replied without hesitation, lifting her tail up in the air happily as she thought of the white apprentice. "We're going to have two litters. The first will be two she-kits, and the second a she-cat and a tom. We both agree, toms are *much* more work."

"*Hey!*" Sunkit's indignant voice came from the edges of the camp,
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where he was crouched by a mouse. Violetkit thought her and Swankit were having a private conversation, but apparently her brother was eavesdropping. "We are *not* more work. Mom"- he turned to Blossomsky -"am I more work than Violetkit and Honeykit?"

Blossomsky's eyes had been heavy with pain all week, but she pressed on as convincing of a smile as she could when she faced her son. "I'd say you two both take quite the effort to raise," she meowed light-heartedly, giving Sunkit's head a quick lick. "Now go on, finish your food. StarClan allowed us to catch that to survive, not for it to be wasted."

Violetkit now lowered her voice as she addressed Swankit. "And does Frostpaw know about this plan? And have you, you know, ever spoken more than one word to him?"

Swankit had been head over paws for Frostpaw ever since she first laid eyes on him, around the time he was about to become an apprentice. Ever since then, she'd considered him the love of her life and believed that they'd become mates in the future, though the longest conversation they've had was when Frostpaw accidentally bumped into her and apologized. Swankit, in her daze and excitement, had forgotten to say anything back.

"It'll happen, it's StarClan's will," the pale gray she-kit meowed confidently.

Just then, ThunderClan's medicine cat Featherpool burst from her den, her gray tabby fur ruffled with unease. Her eyes scanned the camp and - when they landed on Blossomsky - made quick work over to the dappled queen.

"It's Honeykit." Featherpool was clearly trying to keep her voice in a low whisper, but under Violetkit's prying ears, she may as well be shouting. "I think you should come see her."

Blossomsky was on her paws immediately. "I'll be right back kits," she meowed, before glancing over at the Rockledge where Russetfrost was speaking with Lilystar. "Russetfrost!"

ThunderClan's deputy looked over at his mate's call instantly, and after a beckon from Blossomsky he was on his way. The two followed Featherpool into the medicine den without another word.

That night, Blossomsky sat at the nursery's entrance well into the night, staying up hours after everyone had fallen asleep. When Violetkit drifted out of her slumbers and noticed that the nest was still gapingly empty from her mother's presence, she shivered and looked over to the opening. There, silhouetted under the silver moonlight, was Blossomsky.

"Please, StarClan."

Violetkit hadn't expected her mother to speak, so the sound of a voice disrupting the night's quiet almost made her jump in shock. But what was even more surprising were Blossomsky's next words.

"Please, don't take Honeykit. She's too young." A sharp inhale. "She still has such a long life to live. She's not- she's not ready to join your ranks. Please, rid her of this greencough." The dappled queen then bowed her head, turned around, and padded towards her nest.

Quickly, Violetkit shut her eyes and pretended as though she'd been asleep all along, but her mind was racing, even after she felt Blossomsky lay down next to her and drift off. Honeykit was... *dying*? A sharp pang stabbed her heart. How many times had her mother stared up at the stars and prayed to StarClan?

Violetkit wasn't sure if that night was the first, but every night after, Blossomsky would go through the same ritual. A pray that eventually turned into a beg which she'd finish off with a polite dip of her head. But none of it worked.

Honeykit's death came on a sunny, greenleaf morning.

Even though Featherpool's herb supply was plentiful, the disease was too strong, too quick, for the little kit's body to fight, as Russetfrost had explained to Violetkit and Sunkit as Blossomsky buried her muzzle tearfully into her mate's fur. Honeykit had lived a wonderful, short life, and at least her suffering's over.

It didn't feel real. Honeykit's death didn't feel real. Clanmate after Clanmate padding forward to say their condolences didn't feel real. The fact that Violetkit and Sunkit never even got to say goodbye out of fear from them contracting the disease as well didn't feel real. Nothing felt real.

It wasn't until Honeykit's vigil that a surge of emotions ran through Violetkit. Grief and sadness in the lead, but on its heels was hot, red anger.

How could StarClan have done this? Weren't they supposed to be almighty? Didn't they hear Blossomsky's pleads? What was the point of StarClan if they couldn't even save a poor, innocent kit?

The ginger-and-white she-kit's tail-tip twitched with frustration. "It's not fair," she whispered beneath her breath as she watched Blossomsky's whiskers quiver in pain. "It's not right."

Why should she worship a bunch of cats who'd take her sister away like this? Violetkit's tail-tip twitched furiously. But *did* they take away her sister? Did they even exist?

As the little kit pondered those questions well into the night beside a piece of ginger fur used to represent Honeykit's body - the actual one was considered contaminated - she found the possibility of StarClan to be smaller and smaller. And, by the chance that StarClan *was* real, they must be the most useless thing to exist.

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whoo, here's the prologue!! let me know what you think, i'd love to hear your thoughts! thanks for reading!

~ lily
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allegiance

THUNDERCLAN

leader
Lilystar || lithe, tortoiseshell she-cat with white paws and green eyes

deputy
Russetfrost || ginger-and-white tom with blue eyes

medicine cat
Featherpool || gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes

warriors
Blossomsky || dappled white she-cat with amber eyes

Icedust || pale gray tom with dim amber eyes
apprentice; Ravenpaw

Frostsky || white tom with sharp green eyes

Stormbird || black tom with green eyes
apprentice; Sweetpaw

Foxbounce || ginger tom with a white chest and amber eyes

Eaglefrost || brown tom with white paws and blue eyes

Ivydust || black she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes

Sunbounce || blazing ginger tom with blue eyes
apprentice; Violetpaw

Fogsky || white tom with yellow eyes
apprentice; Brightpaw

Dapplelight || tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat with amber eyes

Swanfrost || pale gray she-cat with blue eyes

Tigerdust || dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Leopardbounce || golden bengal with blue eyes

apprentices

Violetpaw || white she-cat with pale green eyes

Sweetpaw || gray tabby she-cat with sharp green eyes

Brightpaw || calico she-cat with blue eyes

Ravenpaw || black tom with yellow eyes

queens & kits

Whitebird || white she-cat with yellow eyes
kits; expecting kits

elders

Dovesky || black-and-white she-cat with blue eyes

Cloverbounce || brown-and-white tom with amber eyes

chapter 1

happy deathday

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"VIOLETDUST!"

Through the boasts of apprentices, gossip of the elders, conversation from warriors forming a loud, happy atmosphere in ThunderClan's camp on a sunny, greenleaf day, Violetdust almost missed the call. But her ears - hypersensitive to her best friend's voice after their seasons together - caught it, and the ginger-and-white she-cat glanced up.

The pale, gray-furred queen was padding Violetdust's way, her belly swollen with unborn kits. Her jaws parted in a loud yawn, sleepiness still lingering from the nap she'd just taken. As she neared, Violetdust purred and flicked her friend's ear lightly in greeting. "Hi, Swanfrost. Hungry?"

"*Starved.*" Swanfrost licked her lips, looking down at the half finished pigeon at Violetdust's paws. "I think I must be eating for five or something, with all the prey that I'm consuming."

The ginger-and-white she-cat gave her friend a fond look, pushing the bird over. "It's all yours."

Swanfrost didn't waste time digging in. She made quick work of the meal, and by the time she was about done with the prey, the entrance to ThunderClan's camp rustled, announcing the arrival of a border patrol. Cats from around the camp got to their paws and padded over to greet their returning Clanmates.

In the patrol's lead was Frostsky, Swanfrost's mate, and the pale gray queen's eyes lit up when she spotted him.

Violetdust had no idea how her best friend's plan of mating with
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Frostsky worked, but it did. The two had started interacting a lot more around the time Swanfrost was about to become a warrior and now, they're expecting their first litter.

Swanfrost got to her paws with a little help from Violetdust and trotted over. A loud purr rumbled through the gray queen as Frostsky licked her ears as Violetdust bypassed the two altogether in favor of her mother Blossomsky, who was standing near the end.

Blossomsky's eyes were heavy. They always seemed to be, and Violetdust couldn't remember the last time she'd seen her mother's gaze bright and happy. It was probably before Honeykit died, a sight enveloped in the ginger-and-white warrior's fuzzy, kithood memories.

But today was the day, out of all days, the dappled she-cat looked the most pained. The yearly anniversary of Honeykit's death was always a sad day for the family.

Violetdust pushed her muzzle into her mother's fur, inhaling Blossomsky's scent deeply. "How was the patrol?"

"Same as usual," Blossomsky replied a little dully, but drew a tongue over her kit's cheek nonetheless. "SkyClan's stopped pushing borders, which I'm sure your father will be happy to hear. That issue's been bothering him and Lilystar for moons."

Violetdust pulled away, observing her mother's appearance with a sharp flicker of anger. How could StarClan do this to a cat? How could they ruin a loyal warrior's life like this?

"StarClan's awful." The mutter came out before she could stop it. "They should've helped. They should've saved Honeykit."

Blossomsky gave her a sharp look. "StarClan doesn't like it when we talk ill of them," she meowed, words Violetdust has heard several, several times. "I'm sure they tried their best to save Honeykit, but these types of things happen."

"Then what's the point?" Violetdust lashed her tail. "If Honeykit's death was StarClan trying their best, why do we care about them so

much? They can't do *anything*."

"They're still our warrior ancestors," the dappled she-cat replied. "We must still honor them."

The ginger-and-white she-cat rolled her eyes, and just as she did so, she felt someone bump her shoulder roughly. "Violetdust, are you arguing with Mom about StarClan *again*?"

Violetdust glanced over to spot the culprit as her brother Sunbounce. Her brother had a playful glint in his eyes, as he always did, but behind them held a heavy, underlay of grief.

"The whole concept is awfully mousebrained," Violetdust declared, twitching her tail-tip indignantly. "I don't see the point in worshipping a bunch of ghosts that can't help with anything."

Blossomsky's only response was a tired shake of her head as Violetdust felt a presence approaching from behind. She didn't have time to glance - or even guess who it may be - before her father's deep, rumbled voice sounded.

"Your sister's in StarClan now, Violetdust." Russetfrost stepped around his two kits to stand beside his mate, nuzzling her gently. "You may hate StarClan but respect them, even if it's just out of respect for Honeykit."

Violetdust rolled her eyes again, but didn't reply. Today probably wasn't the best day to be arguing with her parents. Not when they were meant to be supporting each other.

With all of them standing together like this, it felt painfully obvious that something - or, more accurately, someone - was missing. A family of four that was supposed to be five.

Russetfrost took a deep breath in the brief silence that enveloped them. "Blossomsky, why don't you go get some prey," he meowed gently. "I'll join you in a second, I've just got to check in with Frostsky about the patrol first."

When the dappled white she-cat nodded and padded away, the ThunderClan deputy turned to fix Violetdust with an unimpressed

look.

"Violetdust, your mother's very upset today. I'd hoped you would be more careful in arguing with her."

The ginger-and-white she-cat ducked her head. "Sorry," she mumbled.

Perhaps believing that her apology was insincere, Russetfrost narrowed his eyes, but his chiding subsided. "Right, well, I've really got to speak with Frostsky, and you two have patrols to attend. I'll see you later."

Whereas Blossomsky had taken on an obviously depressed and grieving mood after Honeykit's death, Russetfrost had dedicated himself more and more to his work and distanced himself from his family - pare Blossomsky. And now, as Violetdust watched him pad away, she couldn't help the flicker of anger she felt at StarClan for turning her parents into lifeless shells.

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"**I SWEAR**, I thought you'd said the Sky Oak," Swanfrost protested with laughter, her blue eyes sparkling fondly at Frostsky.

Her mate swallowed the mouthful of rabbit he'd been eating and tipped his head, pretending to think seriously about this topic. "No, I'm pretty sure I said to meet at the Grassy Hollow."

It was sunset, the sun's golden rays were cast through the sky in a brilliant shade of orange. Swanfrost, Frostsky, Violetdust, Sunbounce, and Sunbounce's mate - Whitebird - were sitting together, tucking into prey after a long day. Whitebird's stomach, similar to Swanfrost's, was swollen with kits.

"Anyway, I'd gone to the Sky Oak and he Grassy Hollow, and so when he didn't show, I was certain he didn't want to be with me anymore," Swanfrost meowed, finishing a story from their apprenticeship.

"Oh, I remember that," Violetdust mewed, recalling the week her friend had been utterly heartbroken, before her and Frostsky had
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cleared up the misunderstanding. "But why'd you need to sneak out of camp anyhow? It's not like your relationship wasn't allowed."

Swanfrost shrugged. "Just for the fun of it, I suppose. Surely you two have done so." She directed that last sentence at Sunbounce and Whitebird.

Sunbounce flicked his tail lazily over Whitebird's flank. "Once or twice, maybe. To Grassy Hollow."

Frostsky gave him a knowing look. "That's a good spot."

"Frostsky!" Swanfrost protested, slapping at him with her tail.

As the two toms grinned at each other, Violetdust made a face. "Gross, apprentices *train* there!"

Sunbounce simply flicked her ears lightheartedly. "One day, when you get a mate, Violetdust, you'll understand."

Instantly, Violetdust felt her pelt heat at his words. Not because of his teasing, but because, right across the camp's clearing, she knew if she lifted her head and looked over, there'd be a pair of green eyes looking right back over. And she fully understood sneaking around *just for the fun of it*.

When her friends' attention had moved on, however, she couldn't help but sneak a glance over. As expected, Stormbird's piercing green gaze was fixed on her, growing brighter as she looked over. He tilted his head in indication to ThunderClan's camp opening, pushed himself to his paws, and padded out.

Violetdust's heart started beating quicker with excitement, knowing he wanted her to follow. "Hey, I think I'm going to go for a walk."

Swanfrost glanced at her with concerned eyes. "Really? Would you like me to come along?"

Clearly, she thought it was about Honeykit.

"No, no, that's okay. I think I'd like to be by myself for a while," Violetdust replied.

Sunbounce glanced up worriedly at the sky. "Are you sure? I know today's patrol reported things with SkyClan have quieted down, but Dad and Lilystar think they're just trying to plan an attack. Don't go far."

"I'll just be to the lake and back," Violetdust promised.

Whitebird gave her a smile. "Stay safe."

And with that, the ginger-and-white she-cat turned around and hurried out of camp, trying not to seem too eager as she crossed the clearing and ducked out into the night.

chapter 2

murder mystery

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VIOLETDUST KEPT HER STEPS QUIET AS she padded out of ThunderClan's camp. There was no sign of Stormbird, but his scent was fresh; and that was what she followed, tracking it all the way to the edge of ThunderClan's territory.

She felt like an absolute hypocrite, having questioned why her friends had snuck around when she was doing the same thing. Well, she wasn't doing it completely *just for the fun of it*.

Her parents had reacted badly to when Sunbounce and Whitebird became mates - something mixed with grief in the fact that Honeykit would never have such an experience - and so Violetdust wasn't ready to tell them about Stormbird yet. They were already annoyed enough with her over her opinions on StarClan; there was no need to throw this into the mix.

"Stormbird?" Violetdust called softly as she left the forest and padded onto the beach, watching the water lap gently on the sand. "Where are you?"

When the black tom was nowhere in sight, she decided to try again further down the beach, and this time louder.

"Stormbird?"

By now, she'd reached the edge of ThunderClan's territory, and the Gathering Island, sitting tall and proud in the lake, was in sight. Without thinking about it, Violetdust's tail-tip twitched in disapproval. It wasn't the island that brought her that agitation, but rather the meaning it held; although she liked the four Clans sharing news, she found it mousebrained that they agreed on peace on account of *StarClan*.
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Just as she was about to turn and head down the beach in search of Stormbird, something peculiar happened. She suddenly lost all feeling in her paws, and before she could react, her vision blacked out. It was like she'd fainted, but without pain and out of nowhere.

The only way Violetdust could truly describe it was that it was like falling asleep, but wide awake.

When her vision cleared, the first thing Violetdust saw was a pair of worried, blue eyes. The next thing she saw was a muzzle, so close to her own's that they were nearly touching - and obviously much too near for her comfort.

Yelping, the ginger-and-white warrior scrambled backwards to a respectable distance from the muzzle and blue eyes.

Once she got further away, she noticed the cat in front of her - a small, white she-cat - had stars that rippled in her pelt. Quickly, Violetdust figured she'd been pulled into a dream by those she hated the most: StarClan.

As her mouth opened to demand this StarClan cat send her back, she realized the white she-cat looked none too pleased either. In fact, as this cat recognized her, the anxiety in her blue eyes had turned into specks of annoyance. "Really?" she snapped to nobody in particular before Violetdust could say a thing. "This is who I'm brought to?"

The ginger-and-white she-cat's face twisted with offense, and her tail-tip twitched. "It's not like I want to be here either," she retorted.

"Fine," the white she-cat muttered, but it felt more like she was speaking to some higher power - the mainland of StarClan, perhaps - rather than Violetdust. And that surmise was proven correct when moments later, she turned to address the ThunderClan warrior. "Violetdust, as I understand it, you don't trust StarClan-"

"Don't trust StarClan?" Violetdust lashed her tail. "You've never proven that you *can* be trusted!"

The white feline ignored her interruption, "-but I need you to listen

to me now."

"As if!" Violetdust snorted.

The StarClan cat's eyes hardened. "*Violetdust*," she meowed firmly. "I'm Brightstar, and many moons ago, I was leader of ThunderClan. All I want is the best for the Clan. And if you refuse to trust me, then at the very least, listen to me."

"Yeah, right," the ginger-and-white warrior scoffed. "Go find another cat to carry your message."

"I would like to!" Brightstar snapped suddenly, her patience breaking. "I would love to, believe me, you were not our first choice. But StarClan is losing its connection with the living world, and you're the closest cat to the Gathering island, so you're the only one we can reach at this moment.

"And if you have any respect or love for ThunderClan, any at all, then you will be quiet and *listen to me*."

Violetdust opened her mouth then closed it, feeling more and more uneased with each word Brightstar spoke. "Okay."

"Okay?" The white she-cat exhaled, as if she'd won a long fought battle. "Okay, good. Now, only a few moments ago, we received a terrifying prophecy. I can't reach Lilystar or Featherpool right now, so I need you to bring it to them:

A cat from the past seeks revenge,
their fallen future they want to avenge.
Blood and tears, they're willing to shed,
until their warrior ancestors are once again dead."

The prophecy sounded terrifying, and it took awhile for Violetdust to properly work each word through her mind and shudder. "A cat from the past?" she asked, nervously; all of a sudden, any resistance she had towards StarClan was gone. "Who could that be?"

Brightstar's eyes were dark. "I'm not sure. ThunderClan has its share of enemies. It could be a ShadowClan member, or a rogue, or a Dark Forest cat." She shook out her pelt. "But that's for Lilystar to

worry about, not you. Will you bring the prophecy back?"

Never before had Violetdust thought she'd be helping StarClan, but even she wasn't stupid enough to deny something this important. "Of course."

"Very well-" Brightstar broke off abruptly as her image suddenly flashed, as if she were disappearing. "Mousedung. The connection's breaking."

"That's okay, I-" But before she could say anything else, the connection broke completely, and she was brought back onto the night beach in ThunderClan's territory.

It was much darker now, and the moon was beginning its steady journey up to the sky, its silver light reflecting off the lake. Somewhere in the distance, Violetdust could hear Stormbird's voice calling her name; he was searching for her, but she couldn't force herself to move.

The prophecy had sent a large wave of shock through her - she could hardly believe it was real and felt paralyzed and nauseous at the same time. The texture of the sand beneath her collapsed body was the only thing keeping her grounded right now.

Slowly, she mouthed the prophecy's words, just to make sure she remembered it. Then she climbed onto shaky legs, eager to return to camp and give Lilystar and Featherpool the news as soon as possible.

As soon as she set off, though, a few weird things happened. Well, a little more than simply weird.

First, the moon disappeared.

Violetdust couldn't really be sure how it happened. All she knew was that one moment, the moon's light was guiding her path and the next, it was completely dark.

Right after that, someone attacked her.

It'd come out of nowhere. The ginger-and-white warrior was frozen

from shock from the moon, and before she could recover, she suddenly heard a snarl and felt sharp claws sinking into her pelt. She yowled in pain, twisting as she clawed blindly, desperate to get this cat off of her.

But her attacker - whoever it was - was stronger. With powerful blows they struck her to the ground, and the metallic smell of blood soon bathed Violetdust's tongue.

"Stormbird!" she yowled, desperately hoping the black tom was nearby. He'd been calling for her only a few moments ago, but now, he was silent. "*Stormbird!*"

"Violetdust?" His voice came to her either too far away or too near, she couldn't tell. Everything was tampered with by the incessant ringing in her ear, and despite the way she twisted, her attacker wouldn't let go.

With a fearful lurch, Violetdust realized it was getting harder to breath and her movements were becoming slower. Each blow at her attacker was weaker and weaker, her struggling beginning to subside.

Just before she lost all feeling in her nobody to the numbness of the pain, she opened her jaws to scream for Stormbird again. She could hear paws thumping in the undergrowth and hoped it was him. But just as she parted her mouth, her attacker's scent - through the layers of carefully coated mint - suddenly touched her tongue and she gasped.

Her attacker. She knew who it was.

But before she could yowl the name of the cat, a powerful swipe struck her muzzle and Violetdust's head was thrown sideways in a violent crack, leaving her neck bent in a position that should never happen.

And that's how Violetdust of ThunderClan died.

chapter 3

namesake

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DYING WAS A FUNNY THING. Violetdust wasn't quite sure how to describe it. One moment she was in the most pain she'd ever felt in her life, feeling blood spray over her fur as from the bend in her beck, and the next, she was at peace.

Then came the memories. Thousands and thousands of scenes from her life played out in front of her; befriending Swanfrost, Honeykit's death, apprenticeship, Stormbird, becoming a warrior, that final meal she'd had with her friends before her walk tonight. Then, the sound of her name, drummed again and again until she was certain it was imprinted in her head.

Violetdust. Violetdust. Violetdust.

Following that was a fierce blow of heat, the hatred and loathing she'd felt towards StarClan her entire life. This was only amplified as she realized why she'd been attacked tonight - some cat, somehow, figured out StarClan had given her the prophecy, and they didn't want it to get out.

It was StarClan's fault she died.

Suddenly, a harsh breeze of cold wind blew and the scene of her being attacked flashed brightly in front of her. She saw her attacker's face clearly, and she felt her stomach drop as she realized unhappily that she hadn't scented the cat wrong, that her murderer was truly-

But before she could scream the name - think it, even - everything blacked out.

The last thing she remembered was her name being repeated.
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Violetdust. Violetdust. Violetdust.

Then it all faded into silence.

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"**FEATHERPOOL SAYS** you shouldn't fret too much." A tom's voice, strong and firm, broke through the hazy sleepiness of her brain. "It normally takes kits a few moons to open their eyes."

"But it's already been three." This cat's voice was higher, taking the identity of a she-cat's, taunt with worry. "Sweetkit's already opened *her* eyes."

"They all develop at a different pace, my love," the tom meowed, a sprinkle of a gentle purr in his tone. "You can't expect them to be the exact same."

A pause, and from the way the she-cat spoke next, she surmised that the she-cat had scowled. "You'd better not be laughing at me, Frostsky."

"Me, laugh at you, the great Swanfrost?" Frostsky mewed, clearly teasing. "I'd never dream of it."

Somehow, these names stirred something in the back of her mind, tugging at some unplaceable familiarity that urged her to open her eyes, move, speak - to do *something*. Slowly, she tried to feel the soft, soft moss beneath her body and Swanfrost's heat pressed against her side, wiggling around.

"Ooh, ooh, Frostsky, look!" came Swanfrost's voice, excited. "Violetkit's moving."

With great effort, she - Violetkit - forced her eyes open. At first, everything was blurry, but they focused as the pretty blue eyes of Swanfrost soon swooped down to look at her, full of love and care. "Hello, little one," she cooed. "Frostsky, come see."

Frostsky's eyes were much sharper, the type of green that was so brilliantly clear it hurt to look at. But they were still loving, and he leaned forward to give Violetkit's head a careful lick. "She's
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beautiful."

"She's perfect," Swanfrost whispered softly, her voice suddenly laden with sadness. As Frostsky pressed his pelt against hers, she continued, "I miss her. I miss Violetdust."

For some reason, the name Violetdust rendered with Violetkit too. Perhaps it was just because it shared the same prefix, but it tugged on something in the depths of her brain, hidden away, a constant drum; *Violetdust, Violetdust, Violetdust.*

"I know you do. I do, too. We all do." Frostsky lapped his tongue gently across Swanfrost's ear. "Shall I fetch you some prey? Leopardbounce just caught a thrush today."

"Alright," Swanfrost meowed, curling herself around Violetkit. "Fetch Sweetkit while you're out there. That way, she can come meet her sister."

Frostsky nodded then turned to leave camp. As he did so, Swanfrost pulled Violetkit closer to her body, and the little white she-kit snuggled into her mother's soft gray fur. It was comforting, and she felt a burst of love for her parents; but, somehow, she felt unsettled, a gut feeling that told her that this wasn't right.

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"**VIOLETKIT,** over here!" Sweetkit's voice, a lovely melodic tune, called for her sister's attention. She was standing on the other side of the clearing, racing towards her and waving her tail wildly to indicate her presence.

Violetkit nodded, though she couldn't reply with the moss ball clamped in her jaws. Turning to glance behind her shoulder quickly, she spotted Brightkit and Ravenkit chasing after her, the latter slowly gaining distance with his lengthy legs.

As he got closer and closer, Violetkit quickly tossed the moss ball to Sweetkit; however, Ravenkit had already pounced, and whereas the ball was received safely by Sweetkit, the black tom-kit barreled into Violetkit, knocking her over.
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"Hey!" Violetkit protested, smacking him angrily with her tail. "Get off!"

Ravenkit's yellow eyes gleamed mischievously, and instead of climbing off Violetkit, he suddenly went limp in his legs so that he was laying on top of her completely, crushing her.

"Off, off!" Violetkit demanded, increasing the speed of her tail slaps, though that didn't seem to faze him at all. "You weigh as much as a badger!"

At this, he scowled down at her. "No I don't," he meowed indignantly. "You don't even know how much a badger weighs!"

"I'm *estimating*, fluffbrain," the white she-kit snapped. "Now get off before I kick you off."

Ravenkit lifted his muzzle. "I'd like to see you try," he challenged.

With a face set in hard determination, Violetkit positioned all four legs under Ravenkit and pushed upwards as hard as she could. Ravenkit fought back, too, digging his claws in the ground so that he was unmoving, creating an odd sight where they struggled around with each other until Sweetkit and Brightkit approached them, the moss ball forgotten.

Brightkit tilted her head, her calico fur fluffed in the chilly leaf-fall breeze, the setting sun casting a golden ray on her pelt. "Are you two fighting again?"

"*No*," Violetkit defended herself instantly, "*I'm* not fighting. I'm just trying to regain my freedom to get up, move around, and *breathe*."

Finally, Ravenkit rolled his eyes and hopped off. "Great StarClan, you're dramatic."

For some reason, at the mention of her warrior ancestors, Violetkit felt her pelt prick with annoyance. "I am *not* dramatic," she snapped. "See how you'd react if you were knocked over."

"I only knocked you over because you weren't fast enough to outrun me," Ravenkit mewed smugly.

The white she-kit lashed her tail. "As if! I'm twice as fast as you are!"

Ravenkit tilted his head again in that challenging, infuriating way. "Wanna bet?"

"Yes! Let's race right now." Violetkit whipped around and crouched down, muscles tense, ready to go. "First to the camp entrance has to say yes to everything the other cat says for a week."

"Why only a week?" Ravenkit hummed, crouching down as well. "Only making the punishment short because you're certain you'll lose?"

Violetkit's tail-tip twitched in irritation, and the words came out before she could stop them. "Fine, a moon, then. Sweetkit, can you count us down?"

The pale gray she-kit moved to stand between the two kits. "On my call. One... two... three... go!"

Quickly, Violetkit pounced forward, desperately trying to push ahead of Ravenkit - because having to agree with him for a moon would simply be *humiliating*. For a moment, halfway to the camp's entrance, it seemed to work, and the white she-kit glanced over her shoulder to sneer in Ravenkit's direction.

Distracted, she didn't notice it when a warrior walked in front of her, and she crashed into a mound of ginger far as Ravenkit snickered and darted around, reaching the entrance first with triumphant glee in his eyes.

chapter 4

a fallen sun

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FOR A MOMENT, all Violetkit could feel was anger towards Ravenkit for his victory, uncaring about the warrior she'd bumped into. After all, most cats didn't care if a tiny kit crashed into them while playing. But when the warrior spoke, it was with a stoic, almost cold voice that made Violetkit's ears press to her head in shame almost immediately.

"You really should watch where you're going."

Looking up, the white she-kit met the clear blue eyes of Sunbounce.

She didn't like him very much, for simply one reason: he hated her. But really, Violetkit couldn't even say Sunbounce didn't like her, because he'd never done anything to prove the fact. He'd never been mean to her, or scolded her unnecessarily, or anything like that; but his vibes were just *off*.

Violetkit really couldn't explain it. It wasn't like Sunbounce acted any differently towards her than he did the other kits (except Brightkit, considering he was her father) but it just didn't feel right. It felt like she and Sunbounce really ought to be much closer, which in itself was a weird thought - why would she ever want to be best friends with her friend's dad?

When she'd brought up this concern to Swanfrost, her mother had licked her gently on the head and told her that Sunbounce was going through a rough patch right now. Both his sisters were dead (Violetkit being the namesake of the most recent one) and that these thoughts of Sunbounce's dislike for her was simply made up.

Still, Violetkit took a step back. "Sorry. I wasn't-"
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"Dad!" Brightkit's voice interrupted the white she-kit as the calico sprinted over. "Dad, you're back from the hunting patrol! Catch anything good?"

The ginger warrior's face crumpled with affection as his kit approached. "Only a thrush. But you like thrush, don't you?"

By now, Sweetkit had trotted over, and the four kits relished in the idea of having a meal after running around all day. They found a spot in the corner and settled down with the thrush, splitting the bird into perfectly even pieces - Sweetkit and Brightkit were in charge of this job, as otherwise Violetkit and Ravenkit would tamper with each other's portions.

They were about halfway through the prey when a young apprentice by the name of Eaglepaw padded over, who'd only been made an apprentice a moon prior. "Hey, I'll trade you. Two mice for that thrush."

He was clearly joking, his voice light-heated with a suppressed purr.

Violetkit grinned, playing into the bit. "That's such a bad deal. A thrush is worth three mice *at least*."

"Well I haven't got three mice, I've only got two," Eaglepaw protested. "And it's not even for me - Dovesky's craving bird, and you wouldn't want to deny an elder her preferred piece of prey, would you?"

Violetkit opened her mouth to reply, but she was cut off by the sound of Eaglepaw's sister, Dapplepaw, calling for her brother. "Eaglepaw, I found a pigeon!"

The four kits looked over at the fresh-kill pile to see that the tortoiseshell apprentice had completely overturned the entire pile in search of a winged prey, finally discovering a pigeon at the bottom, her amber eyes glittering with triumph as she carried the bird.

"Nevermind, then, looks like the problem's solved," the brown tom mewed with an easygoing twitch of his pelt. "ThunderClan has the most picky elders, you'll understand soon enough. Enjoy the

thrush."

As he padded away over to Dapplepaw, Violetkit found herself staring after him for a few heartbeats for some odd, unexplainable reason. In fact, it wasn't until Ravenkit spoke again that her attention was returned to her friends.

"Maybe Dovesky's on to something. I mean, thrush really *is* good."

Violetkit raised an eyebrow, uncaring. "Okay?"

Then he grinned his mischievous grin, and the white she-kit had a feeling something bad was coming. She was instantly proven right when he meowed, "Looks like I'm all done with my piece, though? Can I have the rest of yours, Violetkit?"

Violetkit blinked at him in miffed disbelief, and her response varied in a range that would have Swanfrost scolding her for the rest of eternity. So, she settled for something more mild. "Did you hit your head too many times today? Maybe I accidentally knocked it too hard during the game."

But Ravenkit seemed unbothered. "As you'll remember, according to the rules of our race today, the loser - you - has to say yes to everything the winner - me - asks for a moon. We were all there when *you* came up with that condition, no?"

Mousedung, he was right.

Violetkit's throat grumbled with a low growl, but there was nothing she could do as she shoved her piece of prey over to Ravenkit's eager paws. "You're awful."

"Awful but happy," the black tom-kit meowed cheerily.

Perhaps sensing that Violetkit's glare was a bit too intense to be considered a normal, kit fight, Sweetkit quickly tore half of her food and passed it over to her sister. "Don't mind him," she murmured quietly. "He just likes bothering you, that's all."

Violetkit ruffled her fur, still a little miffed despite her sister's comforting words, and instead touched her tail-tip to Sweetkit's

shoulder rather than a verbal reply. As she dug into the food, her entire mind was focused on hoping that Ravenkit wouldn't ask for this piece, too; that was why she didn't even notice the fight break out until it was at its full height.

It was a fight between Sunbounce and Stormbird. Apparently it'd began with a solemn conversation about Sunbounce's deceased sister, Violetdust - then it turned into an ugly mess of teeth and claws, with Frostsky leaping in to sort it all out.

Now apart, the two toms were still hissing at each other, tails lashing with anger.

"You killed her!" Sunbounce was snarling Stormbird's way. "Everyone here knows you did it! Everyone knows you killed Violetdust!"

"I didn't kill her!" Stormbird retorted, and somewhere deep in his green eyes, was heavy pain and grief. "I would never-"

"You were the only one out in the forest the night she died," Sunbounce spat furiously.

"Clearly not, as I wasn't the one to do anything," the black warrior hissed back. "I wouldn't ever lay a claw on her! I-"

"Then explain what you were doing out that night," Sunbounce meowed tightly, with barely concealed rage. "Explain how, for StarClan's sake, you found her right as she was dying."

"I-" Stormbird swallowed thickly. It sounded as though he were debating between two answers, before finally deciding. "I already told you. I was just out on a walk and I heard her screaming, but when I got there her murderer had left."

"Likely story," Sunbounce sneered.

"It *is* a likely story, because it's true," Stormbird snapped. "I've defended myself to you again and again and again, and I shouldn't have to do so any longer!"

For a moment, Sunbounce didn't say anything or move; the only

sign that he'd even heard Stormbird's words was a darkening in his blue eyes. Then, before any cat could stop him, he slid out his claws and jumped.

chapter 5

the fight

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IF ANY CAT WASN'T paying attention before - or, at the very least trying to keep up the pretense of minding their own business - they certainly were now. Shrieks and yowls filled ThunderClan's camp as the two toms wrestled with each other, sharp claws drawing their own Clanmate's blood.

"Sunbounce! Sunbounce, what're you doing? Get off!" Frostsky demanded, grabbing at the ginger tom with little success. "Stormbird, stop-"

"I'm not fighting you!" Stormbird roared at Sunbounce, ignoring the white tom and swiping angrily at the ginger feline on top of him; despite his words, he'd drawn out his claws too, and now crimson splattered on Sunbounce's already red pelt. "You're crazy!"

"I think I'm allowed to act a little crazy towards the cat that *killed my sister*!" Sunbounce spat.

Everyone in ThunderClan knew Sunbounce's family had struggled deeply with his sister Honeykit's death. And now, the murder of Violetdust seemed to make the ginger tom crack.

"*I didn't kill her!*" Stormbird snarled back, and a puddle of blood had formed on the dirt ground before Frostsky and ThunderClan's deputy, Russetfrost, managed to drag the two apart.

Both were in bad shape. Sunbounce's ear was torn, and there were claw marks running down his body; Stormbird was littered in scratches, and it seemed that Sunbounce managed to bite a deep gash into his shoulder. For a moment, they just stood there, panting and glaring at each other, with the buffer of Frostsky and Russetfrost between them.
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"Now what just happened here?" Russetfrost thundered, his voice full of anger. "Clanmates turning on each other with the issues at SkyClan's borders and entering leafbare? We're meant to be supporting one another, not *hurting*. What will Lilystar say when she sees this?"

Sunbounce hissed. "I was only fighting Violetdust's murderer. Funnily enough, I find that to be justified."

Annoyance flashed in Stormbird's green gaze. "I didn't-"

"You've already said countless times that you didn't kill Violetdust, and Lilystar's cleared you of the crime." Sunbounce paused, and for the first time in this entire argument, he sounded stable in using logic to back up his words. "But Violetdust died near the lake, there's no way a cat from any other Clan could've gotten through our territory undetected. You were the *only one*-"

"But I didn't do it!" Stormbird meowed fiercely. "I didn't, I swear on StarClan."

Sunbounce laughed flatly. "And how much does *that* count for now that StarClan's abandoned us?"

Violetkit had heard - from whispers passed around by every cat - that StarClan had broken contact with the Clans almost immediately after Violetdust's death. Swanfrost had been very upset to learn that her kits knew of this worrying situation, but it was hard to keep it a secret when it was on every cat's mind all day.

Speaking of Swanfrost, the queens - Swanfrost, Whitebird, and Ivydust - had been working hard to fight their way through the crowd to reach the kits, and now finally arrived. With a sweep of their tail, they beckoned their kits into the nursery and away from all the chaos, putting them to bed (though nobody fell asleep) as soon as they entered before retreating to a conversation of their own.

"Really, you'd think Sunbounce would know better," Whitebird, Sunbounce's mate, murmured quietly. "I mean honestly, causing a scene like this..."

"Violetdust was very dear to many of us," Swanfrost replied tightly, and Violetkit had a feeling they'd had this conversation countless times. "Blossomsky and Russetfrost had never gotten over Honeykit, and now-"

"Yes, but attacking a Clanmate is simply unheard of," Whitebird mewed. "I understand he loved Violetdust, but there's no need for *this*."

"The real question," came Ivydust's low voice, "is whether or not Stormbird played a role in Violetdust's death."

A pause occurred as the queens thought about it.

"They used to be quite close when we were apprentices," Swanfrost meowed slowly. "They grew apart once we became warriors, but I still can't imagine he'd do anything to harm her."

"Maybe they had something going on secretly," Whitebird suggested after a beat. "Did she tell you anything, Swanfrost? You were her best friend, after all."

The pale gray queen inhaled sharply. "If she had something going on, she didn't tell me."

There was clear tension between Swanfrost and Whitebird, which Ivydust broke with the sound of her clearing her throat. "Well, we'd best get back out there, shouldn't we?"

"Do you reckon the kits will stay put?" Swanfrost asked.

"I'd bet Ravenkit's asleep already," Ivydust replied, her voice getting distant as she ducked out of the nursery, and the sound of paws crunching dry dirt came as Swanfrost and Whitebird followed her.

As soon as they were gone, Violetkit leaped to her paws and poked Sweetkit. "C'mon, let's go see what's happening."

The gray tabby she-kit peeled open one eye to give her sister a pointed look. "I'm not sure. Mom sounds upset. I think it's best to stay here."

"You're no fun," Violetkit meowed, before turning her attention across the den to Whitebird's nest. "Brightkit?"

"I shouldn't," came Brightkit's muffled voice, as though she'd dug herself a deep spot beneath the moss. Clearly, Sunbounce's fight had freaked her out. "I've never seen Dad like that before. I don't-" She broke off, as though unsure of what else to say.

"Fine." Violetkit shrugged, hopping out of Swanfrost's nest. "I'll go by myself."

She was all set to go when a voice piped up from Ivydust's nest. "No, I want to come."

Turning around, the white she-kit scowled at what looked like nothing more than a shadow slipping this way and that. "I thought your mom said you were asleep."

"She *thought* I was asleep," Ravenkit sniffed. "Big difference."

"Whatever." Violetkit rolled her eyes though he couldn't see it. "You can't come along."

"Why not?"

"Because I say so," Violetkit snapped. "I don't want your company."

Ravenkit tipped his head in his stupid, infuriating challenge, his yellow eyes gleaming through the darkness towards her like the sun. "Well what if I don't want *your* company?"

Violetkit frowned, confused. "What?"

But before she'd worked it out, Ravenkit had already sprinted past her and was wiggling out of the nursery's entrance, calling over his shoulder, "But thankfully, I'm a nice cat, so I guess I won't say no if you join."

The white she-kit gaped after him; now, he'd made it seem like *she's* the annoying one that insisted on tagging along. But, curiosity pushed past her pride, so all she did was mutter, "Annoying furball," before following Ravenkit out of the nursery.

chapter 6

the ghost assassin

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THE MOON WAS STARTING its climb up the sky when Violetkit and Ravenkit wiggled out of the nursery's roots, and in the dark, the white she-kit could make out the shadowy silhouettes of her Clanmates - warriors, apprentices, and elders alike - crowded by the Highledge.

"Never before have I seen my warriors act like this." This was Lilystar, whose tortoiseshell fur ruffled with disapproval as she spoke. "Especially in times of disparity, such as this one. Not only are SkyClan pushing borders, but StarClan's disappeared. Do you really think two grown cats fighting like kits will bring them back?"

Lilystar's an old cat - that much was seen by the specks of white around her muzzle. She'd always been the respected, wise one, so maybe she'd been expecting Sunbounce and Stormbird to apologize. But she was sorely mistaken.

"I'm sorry, Lilystar, but I did what was right." Sunbounce sat up taller, squaring his chest. "A murderer - especially *Violetdust's* murderer - should receive repercussions."

There was that name again - Violetdust. Though Violetkit had known this whole thing was about Sunbounce's sister and Swanfrost's best friend, hearing the name brought her attention to another level, and she found herself starting to creep closer.

"*Violetkit.*" Ravenkit's whisper, a sharp hiss, came from behind the white she-kit. "What're you *doing*? Get back here."

"Be quiet," Violetkit meowed back. "You're being too loud. You're going to get us caught."
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"Oh, *I'm* going to get us caught?" Ravenkit rolled his eyes. "*I'm* not the one whose pelt doesn't blend in with the night."

Violetkit glanced at her fur, then scowled. "Who cares? *You're* the one that's whining and complaining. Now either be quiet or go back to the nursery."

Ravenkit grumbled, but to his credit, he followed Violetkit to as close to the Highledge as they could be before ducking into a nearby bush. "Great, thanks to that, we're much closer and have a higher chance of being discovered. Now *why* do we need to be so close that we can hear Lilystar breathe?"

Truthfully, Violetkit didn't have an answer to that. Somehow, hearing Violetdust's name made her feel as though she ought to be part of the conversation, or at the very least hear the entire thing, loud and clear. But she couldn't tell Ravenkit that, because it was absurd. So instead, she very wisely told him to shut up.

"*Calm down.*" Somewhere, between sneaking closer and speaking with Ravenkit, Sunbounce and Stormbird were snarling at each other again, and Russetfrost was now in the middle of them, waving his tail tiredly.

"Don't you care, Dad?" Sunbounce snapped. "Don't you care that-"

"What I care about now is having a Clan who'd support each other through this upcoming leafbare." Russetfrost's voice was firm.

Sunbounce's eyes flashed. "You hardly spoke to anyone for moons after Honeykit died," he meowed coldly at last, "and she was taken by natural cause. But when Violetdust was murdered, you hardly flinched."

Russetfrost growled. It was the first time Violetkit had seen him lose his temper. "Of course I was upset when Violetdust died. If we found her killer, I'd be happy to send them to the spirit lands myself!"

Sunbounce gestured to Stormbird a little wildly. "He's standing right in front of us-"

"Lilystar cleared him-"

"But don't you think-"

"*No*," Russetfrost barked, his voice thundering through the camp almost scarily. "No, what I think is that Violetdust protested StarClan her whole life, then died the same night they disappeared. Maybe they're trying to communicate something. Maybe it was their will."

Sunbounce jerked his muzzle with disagreement. "That's a load of mousedung-"

"*Enough*, Sunbounce," Lilystar meowed, anger creeping in her tone as well. "This is hardly the time to have this discussion. We're gathered together to decide what to do about StarClan and Violetdust's murderer, whomever that may be. We aren't here to watch you and your father argue."

Finally, the ginger tom looked a little remorseful, and though he folded his ears to his head like a scolded kit, his blue eyes still flashed with defiance.

"Now," the ThunderClan leader mewed, addressing the entire Clan once more. "Tensions are clearly very high even though I've judged Stormbird as innocent, so let's review this. Stormbird, please tell us what happened from your perspective."

"Well-" The black tom swallowed hard, as if he'd been asked to tell this story too many times. "I was taking a walk in the forest. Fogsky can vouch that I left camp *before* Violetdust did - there's no way I could've planned to murder her if I didn't even know whether or not she'd leave camp."

Sunbounce dug at the ground with agitation at these words, but remained quiet.

"Then, after a while, I heard screaming. I ran over, and I found her body." Stormbird ruffled his fur as he came to the end of his story. "I didn't see anyone else around."

"But it couldn't have been a cat from another Clan," Sunbounce

challenged. "Surely they would've left a clue."

Very suddenly, a cold chill swept over the gathered cats as they were faced with the possibility that this murderer may be a Clanmate. Though Stormbird had initially been on the suspect list, that meant he had a spotlight on him. Every cat knew who to be careful of. But now, if it wasn't Stormbird, this murderer was hidden and unexpected, and the unknown was always frightening.

Sunbounce seemed to realize this, and quickly tried to backtrack his words. "I didn't mean-"

"Maybe it's the Ghost Assassin," an elder by the name of Dovesky called out, clearly trying to relieve the tension. "Remember? Ashbird of SkyClan was killed out of nowhere, no clues left behind. Great StarClan, Crowstar was furious."

"Well, Ashbird was his daughter, so I can't blame him," Lilystar meowed a little dryly, "and the Ghost Assassin happened *years* ago, Dovesky. Likely Ashbird was taking a walk, accidentally slipped, and hit her head wrong. Only kits still believe in the Ghost Assassin."

A round of light-hearted, teasing purrs rose as Dovesky dipped her head and licked her chest fur in embarrassment, the tension successfully diffused.

However, Violetkit was lost. She'd never heard of any story about a Ghost Assassin before, and when even Ravenkit's whiskers twitched with amusement, she found herself grumbling and swallowing all her pride to ask him what it was.

"Swanfrost's never told you the story?" Though his voice held a tone of mild surprise, a stronger build of teasing laughter was brewing in his yellow eyes. "Everyone knows of the Ghost Assassin."

"I don't," Violetkit gritted out.

"Well you've got ears, haven't you?" Ravenkit turned back to the Clan gathering. "They just went over the whole story."

The white she-kit scowled. She didn't know why she'd bothered to

ask him, anyway. He was as unhelpful as ever. "Nevermind. Let's go."

Just as she'd wiggled out of the bush though, she heard Ravenkit scampering after her, followed by his voice, low with apprehension of being caught, once they were far away enough. "It happened when our parents were newly made warriors. Ashbird was killed mysteriously in the middle of the night."

Violetkit stopped, tilting her head to take in this information - for some unknown reason, it interested her, perhaps more than it should've. "I thought Lilystar said she slipped."

Ravenkit snorted. "From what my mom told me, it was a clear murder. Her neck was bent oddly, and there was blood everywhere. She was hardly recognizable." Seeing Violetkit's face, growing slowly frightened, he quickly added, "But maybe she just made that up so I would stay in the nest at night."

The white she-kit ruffled her fur. "No clues?"

"No. Crowstar kept everyone searching for moons, but there was nothing. The killer knew the territory too well. And if this really *is* the Ghost Assassin... if he didn't leave a single tuft of fur behind in SkyClan's bramble territory... I don't see how he'd have left anything in ours."

"So this assassin's a SkyClan cat," Violetkit concluded. "He must be."

Ravenkit shrugged. "Maybe. The Ghost Assassin is just a theory become tale, after all. But Brightkit thinks it's true, so don't tell her the truth. I think it's the only reason she's so well behaved, and if you break it to her that the Ghost Assassin isn't real-"

"She'll be delighted?"

"Yeah, but her mother will be furious. Whitebird will have your neck if her angel kit suddenly starts breaking the rules."

Violetkit purred lightly at the mere thought. Who knew Ravenkit could say something that wasn't completely mousebrained?

"I hope that story gives you nightmares."

Violetkit sighed. And he's back.

chapter 7

the apprenticeship

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VIOLETKIT WAS JITTERY WITH EXCITEMENT as she waited by the nursery's entrance. Her white pelt had been washed countless times, to a point where even Swanfrost had quit fussing with it in favor of Sweetkit's tabby fur.

Today was her apprentice ceremony. And despite the cold, brisk wind of leafbare with the promise of snow, Violetkit couldn't imagine a better day.

Soon enough, sunhigh had come, and patrols were beginning to return from their assignments. Hunting patrols carried with them the skinny bodies of prey, whereas border patrols grumbled about the long going SkyClan issue. One by one, after greeting their friends, they bunched together beneath the Highledge, chatting aimlessly amongst themselves.

Violetkit watched this with a tinge of silly pride - that they were all coming together to watch her and Sweetkit - but she couldn't shake the odd sense of déjà vu, like she'd done this before.

As Sweetkit approached her, finally managing to escape Swanfrost's grasp, Violetkit spotted a flash of black fur from the corner of her eyes. Turning, she saw Ravenpaw taking a seat besides the two older apprentices, Eaglepaw and Dapplepaw.

"Oh, no," she grumbled.

Sweetkit glanced at her. "What?"

Ever since Ravenpaw had become an apprentice two moons ago, the white she-kit had spent those moons in pure bliss. There was no annoying thorn on her side; it was just her, Sweetkit, and Brightkit.
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She'd forgotten about him and that she'd have to share a den with him again once becoming an apprentice.

But before she could tell this to her sister, Lilystar jumped onto the Highledge and lashed her tail. "Let all cats of ThunderClan gather around the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Very quickly, the chatters quieted, and the two kits bounded up eagerly to Lilystar's side as their mother took a seat beside Frostsky. The ThunderClan leader turned to Sweetkit first.

"Sweetkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Sweetpaw. Your mentor will be Stormbird."

Even from the corner of her eye, Violetkit can see shock ripple through the Clan and Swanfrost start to bristle.

It had been moons since Sunbounce and Stormbird's fight, but tensions between the two toms were high, and it seemed that Swanfrost was taking the ginger tom's side as to who Violetdust's murderer was. Clearly, she wasn't happy Stormbird was assigned Sweetpaw's mentor.

And when Lilystar turned to Violetkit and assigned her her mentor, the white she-cat couldn't help but wonder if maybe the ThunderClan leader was purposefully trying to cause commotion.

"Violetpaw, your mentor will be Sunbounce."

As soon as Lilystar spoke the ginger tom's name, Violetpaw felt her stomach drop like a stone. Her previous opinion on Sunbounce still stood, and every time they interacted, he was so coldly polite that it felt mean. It was a feeling she couldn't explain, but she found herself wishing she and Sweetpaw could switch mentors.

Sunbounce's muscles were tense as he padded up to tap his nose against Violetpaw's. It hardly seemed like he was paying attention; he looked more interested in shooting sideways glares at Stormbird. Mentoring littermates meant they'd have to spend a lot of time

together.

"Violetpaw! Sweetpaw!" the Clan cheered, their new names echoing into the brisk leafbare air.

Everything after that was a whirlwind of joy. Cat after cat after cat came up to congratulate Violetpaw and Sweetpaw, and Swanfrost and Frostsky stood by their kits proudly the entire time. To Violetpaw's surprise, even Eaglepaw and Dapplepaw came over, Ravenpaw padding a little behind them.

When he approached, the white she-cat tensed, expecting him to make fun of her like he always did. But instead, all Ravenpaw meowed was a brief, "Congratulations."

Violetpaw blinked, surprised at the simplicity and genuineness of it. "Thanks."

Ravenpaw shrugged. "I was rooting for you to accidentally tumble off the Highledge, but you didn't. So good job."

Of course he could never give her a *real* compliment.

Violetpaw scowled, but she quickly wiped it away when Eaglepaw stepped towards her, a kind smile fluttering on his face. "Congratulations on becoming an apprentice. I hope you like cleaning dens and dealing with ticks, because that's pretty much all we do around here."

His blue eyes glittered jokingly as he spoke, mirroring the wide sky on a beautiful day, so much so that the white she-cat found herself stumbling stupidly over her words.

"Oh, yes. I love- I love cleaning dens. And the ticks." Great StarClan, she wanted to smack herself.

Ravenpaw gave her an odd look, which only added to the mortifying situation. "What's wrong with you?"

"*Shut up*," Violetpaw hissed at him, her pelt heating with embarrassment, but it hardly mattered. Eaglepaw had already moved to offer his welcome to Sweetpaw, and thankfully didn't see

that exchange.

Before long, Sunbounce and Stormbird called for their apprentices, and Violetpaw and Sweetpaw detangled themselves from their friends and family in favor of their mentors, eager to begin their training.

"Well, first things first, I think a territory tour is in order," Stormbird meowed. He glanced at Sunbounce, as if expecting him to add on; however, the ginger tom was staring firmly into nowhere. The black tom then huffed and faced the apprentices again. "Fine. I'll take Sweetpaw on a tour-"

"No," Sunbounce mewed sharply, suddenly snapping into attention. "You can't be trusted. What if something happens?"

Though he didn't say it, the word killer hung thickly in the air.

Stormbird, however, didn't blunder around it, and simply rolled his eyes. "Then you'd finally be able to frame me for murder, wouldn't you? I expect you'd be rather happy about that."

"I've known Swanfrost my whole life," Sunbounce meowed as if Stormbird hadn't spoken. "She was Violetdust's best friend, and I promised I'd keep an eye on her kits."

"Good thing I'm planning to watch out for my apprentice's safety as well, then," the black tom mewed dryly, clearly tired with the whole debacle. "Assuring your apprentice's survival is a basic requirement as a mentor, I think."

Sunbounce ignored him again. "We'll all take the tour together," he decided, starting out the camp. "Come on, let's go."

As he marched firmly out of camp, Stormbird gestured to the entrance for them to follow. "You two best hurry along, before he thinks I clawed off your legs or something."

His words were so painfully sarcastic that neither sister could take it seriously, so they simply exchanged laughing looks and purrs before padding out after Sunbounce into ThunderClan's territory for the first time.

chapter 8

skyclan

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THUNDERCLAN'S TERRITORY was the most beautiful thing Violetpaw had ever seen. The thick oak trees and frosted ground created a magical landscape, and the white she-cat wondered what it'd look like covered in snow, or in full blossom during greenleaf.

Sunbounce and Stormbird decided to circle ThunderClan's territory, and veered down to the lake first. The frigid water lapped the beach as the four cats padded over, and Violetpaw shivered, feeling exposed without the thick trees as a breeze blew by.

"This is our beach," Stormbird meowed, a little proudly. "See right there? That's the Gathering Island, and across the lake there is RiverClan. If it weren't so cloudy today, you'd be able to see right to that little strip of land their camp is on."

Sweetpaw's eyes widened with admiration. "Wow, I didn't realize."

"You're very knowledgeable," Sunbounce mewed, a little icily. "Clearly you know this area very well."

Based on his tone, Violetpaw realized - with a lurch - that they must be standing on the beach that Violetdust was murdered at.

Oddly enough, despite having heard about it ever since she was born, it didn't feel real until she was standing with the sand beneath her paws. And all of sudden, presented with how real it was and that there truly was a murderer on loose, Violetpaw felt sick to her stomach.

To the ginger tom, Stormbird ignored him and padded on. "Come on, we should stop by SkyClan's border before returning to camp."

The fact that they were approaching the edge of ThunderClan's
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territory became clearly obvious as the earthy, pine scent of SkyClan grew stronger. The tension between the two Clans was clear, too, as the scents left by border patrols smelled irritated and prickly.

Stormbird took one sniff of the place and twitched his pelt in disapproval. "We've already given them land before, that's why they're here at all," he muttered lowly. "There's no reason they should need more."

Sunbounce nodded, and before Violetpaw could process the fact that this was perhaps the first time she'd seen the ginger tom react without hostility to Stormbird, the bushes across the border rustled, and a brown tabby she-cat padded out. Behind her fanned out her patrol, each SkyClan warrior eyeing the ThunderClan cats with distrust.

The brown tabby she-cat twitched her tail-tip coldly. "Sunbounce. Stormbird," she mewed curtly. "Did I hear you saying something about SkyClan just then?"

Sunbounce's muscles were stiff as he moved to stand in front of Violetpaw, his pelt beginning to bristle as though he were anticipating a fight. "I don't see how what we say concerns you, Ferndust."

Ferndust narrowed her eyes. "Normally I wouldn't care about the mousebrained words that come out of your mouth, but if you're talking about SkyClan, it concerns me. I thought that was rather easy to put together."

As Sunbounce's tail began to lash with agitation, Stormbird quickly stepped forward. "We're not looking for any trouble, Ferndust," he meowed coolly. "We're only showing our apprentices around."

"Oh." The corner of Ferndust's mouth twitched, a little cruelly. "Did you show them the beach, then? The place that Clanmate of yours - what was her name again? - *Violetdust* died?"

Sunbounce's eyes flashed at the mention of his sister, and Stormbird bowed his head a little.

Ferndust took in their reaction with a cool look, and she laughed without amusement a few heartbeats later. "So the Ghost Assassin strikes again."

Clearly, she thought this was the end of the conversation, and moved to instruct her patrol to start marking the border; however, Sunbounce called her back as though he couldn't stop the words from coming out of his mouth. "There is no Ghost Assassin."

Ferndust halted in her steps as if she'd been frozen, turning around slowly. "What did you say?"

"There is no Ghost Assassin," Sunbounce meowed, a little louder and firmer. "Violetdust was killed for unknown reasons, but it wasn't by some made-up cat whose first attack happened *years* ago. That's only an insult to her memory."

Ferndust lunged forward, so suddenly that Violetpaw flinched. However, the brown tabby stopped short of the border, her green eyes mangled with a wild sort of anger and grief. "The Ghost Assassin isn't real? Well of course he is! He killed Ashbird!"

"Ashbird slipped and fell," Sunbounce mewed instantly, as though reciting it. "It was leafbare, the paths were slippery, and she stepped wrong-"

"You expect me to believe that my best friend died because she'd *stepped wrong*?" Ferndust's voice was low, dangerous. Despite being by herself now - she'd sent the rest of the patrol off to mark the border - she didn't even seem a little bit afraid, fueled by anger. "Ashbird knew the territory like the patterns on her fur. She never would've *stepped wrong*. Claiming so is only an insult to *her* memory."

Sunbounce sneered. "Right. It's much more believable that a random cat killed her for absolutely no reason at all and somehow didn't leave anything behind."

"Isn't that exactly what happened with Violetdust?" Ferndust challenged. "She died mysteriously one night out of the blue. No hints."

"It's not the same at all." The ginger tom glanced at Stormbird sharply, as if to say he knew who the culprit was, but was smart enough to keep his mouth shut.

"Come on," Stormbird meowed. "We should go."

"Oh no, so soon?" Ferndust mewed sarcastically. "What a shame."

Sunbounce rolled his eyes and snarled, but he made no verbal comeback as he pivoted sharply and stalked into the thick oak trees of ThunderClan. Violetpaw and Sweetpaw followed him quickly, both riveted from the SkyClan encounter, pestering him with questions.

"Do you think the Ghost Assassin is real?"

"Did he kill Ashbird?"

"How could he have gotten out without being spotted?"

"Was Ferndust Ashbird's best friend?"

"No, no, I don't know, and yes," Sunbounce answered all in one breath tiredly.

"Woah." Violetpaw's eyes widened. "Ferndust knew Ashbird? That must be so cool, personally knowing a cat from one of those elder stories."

Her mentor winced. "Believe it or not, it's not actually that fun," he mewed. "Having someone you're close to die is never fun."

Violetpaw's ears folded to her head, instantly embarrassed. "I know. I'm sorry. I didn't mean-"

"That's okay." Sunbounce cleared his throat. "When we get back, go find one of the older apprentices to help you get some moss. Then, after you've cleaned out the elders den, you can get some prey, alright?"

"Alright." Violetpaw shared a look with Sweetpaw, who'd been given the same instructions by Stormbird. Then, with an air of

awkward silence, the four cats padded back to camp.

chapter 9

puppy love

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ONCE THEY REACHED CAMP, Sweetpaw assigned Violetpaw the lovely job of fetching mouse bile while she collected moss from a tree near the nursery. The white she-cat had tried protesting, but her sister had gone before she could say a thing, tossing a cheeky smile at Violetpaw over her shoulder.

So, Violetpaw set off finding mouse bile, which turned out to be a much harder task than she'd anticipated. She hadn't the slightest clue where to begin looking, and so looked around the camp to see if there was someone that could help her. When she realized Ravenpaw was the only other apprentice in sight, it took her a long while to swallow her pride and pad up to him.

"Hey."

Ravenpaw looked up at her from where he'd been sunbathing, his yellow eyes a sleepy mess and completely unimpressed. "What do you want?"

Violetpaw shifted her weight, taking a deep breath. "Could you help me find the mouse bile?"

The black tom raised an eyebrow, as though he couldn't quite believe what he was hearing. "You'd like me to leave my comfy spot in the sun - which I had to fight Brightkit for, by the way - to help you find *mouse bile*?"

"Yeah."

Ravenpaw scoffed, laying his head back down and burying his muzzle beneath his paws again. "No."
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"Ravenpaw, *please*?" Violetpaw hated asking him for anything, much less practically *begging* him, but she'd already upset Sunbounce today and didn't wish for it to happen again. "It's only my first day. Just point me in the right direction."

"No," he replied again. "Now go away."

Violetpaw was about to sigh and give up when she suddenly felt the presence of another cat come up behind her, followed by a low, soothing voice. "What's the matter here?"

A strong, earthy scent filled her nose (he must've just returned from patrol), and the white she-cat already knew it was Eaglepaw before she turned around to face him. Despite having complete awareness of who she was speaking to, her words still came out jumbled and stupid as though she'd been caught off guard. "Mouse bile."

Eaglepaw's eyes glittered with gentle laughter. "I'm sorry?"

"Mouse bile," Violetpaw repeated, as though it would clear anything up, then promptly wanted to claw her eyes out. "I'm looking for mouse bile. Sunbounce and Stormbird want Sweetpaw and I to take care of the elders' ticks and clean their den."

"Elders on the first day?" Eaglepaw wrinkled his nose sympathetically. "That's rough."

"Yes. Well. Clan life is occasionally rough." Violetpaw's pelt burned with embarrassment - Great StarClan, what was wrong with her?

The brown apprentice purred, not in a way where he was laughing at her, but more in a way where he thought she'd made a funny joke. "Just so you know for the future, you don't need to search around for mouse bile. It's typically kept in the medicine den. Come on, I'll show you."

Violetpaw plastered a smile on her face, hoping it didn't seem too eager or mortified. "Thanks."

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"WHERE'VE YOU BEEN?" Sweetpaw was waiting by the den's
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entrance with rolls of moss at her paws when the white she-cat padded over, carrying a stick coated with mouse bile. "I didn't want to go in without you."

Violetpaw twitched her pelt, the meowed something along the lines that she couldn't find the mouse bile and that next time *she* could be the one who fetched moss while *Sweetpaw* dealt with the droppings - but it all sounded incoercible, as everything was muffled by the stick. So, Sweetpaw just shrugged and ducked inside.

The elders, Dovesky and Cloverbounce, were both there when the apprentices entered, hiding from the brisk leafbare day. They were dozing off, but Dovesky was roused almost immediately and lifted her head.

"Thank StarClan," she meowed, ruffling her fur. "These ticks have been bothering me for the longest time, I've been waiting for them to send someone."

"I'm here to clean the nests," Sweetpaw mewed, glancing at Cloverbounce's sleeping form a little awkwardly. "Erm- should I-?"

Dovesky lifted her ears, as though she'd just realized. "Oh, right, of course. Cloverbounce"- she tapped her mate lightly with her tail -"Cloverbounce, wake up."

Though Cloverbounce didn't react until she'd hit him at least five times, he didn't seem to be in deep sleep, for he opened one sleepless eye and flicked her back with his own tail. "I heard you the first time, Dovesky."

"Well, you weren't *moving*," Dovesky retorted without edge. "Sweetpaw here needs to clean our nest."

Cloverbounce grumbled, but still rolled out of their nest without much protest as Dovesky followed him. Violetpaw felt a grin spreading on her face as she padded over with the mouse bile; it was cute how they interacted, to be so in love with the same cat after years and years.

Dovesky caught her smile, and returned it with her own. "What're

you laughing on about?"

"Nothing." Violetpaw shifted, crouching to focus the stick of bile on a tick on Dovesky's shoulder. "You two just have a nice relationship, that's all."

"Us?" The black-and-white elder snorted in a lighthearted way. "Please, we're nothing compared to your parents."

"Our parents?" Sweetpaw's ears stood up with interest. "What do you mean?"

"Well, your mother was in love with your father ever since she was a young kit." Dovesky settled into a comfortable sprawl, her blue eyes glittering in that wise way elders' always seemed to as Cloverbounce snored on beside her. "I believe all the kits and apprentices were playing a game one day, and Frostsky - well, Frost*kit* at the time - volunteered to be the badger when nobody else wanted to."

Violetpaw made a face. "She fell in love with him because he agreed to play a badger?"

"Well, he saved the game," Dovesky pointed out, "and since then, Swanfrost tried everything she could to get him to notice her. On her first day of being an apprentice, she even tried making a catch - and a thrush at that, mind you."

"Did she get it?"

A soft purr rose from Dovesky's throat. "No, of course not. She tripped over her tail and tumbled quite a bit before stopping, and came close to breaking her leg. She had to stay in the medicine den for a week after that."

"Well, Dad must've noticed her then," Violetpaw mewed matter-of-factly. "She was sent to the medicine den, for StarClan's sake."

"Yes, but Frostsky's a tom, you must remember," Dovesky replied. "They hardly notice anything until it falls out from the sky in front of them. No, I don't even think they spoke more than a sentence to each other until Frostsky was about to become a warrior."

"Really?" Sweetpaw's ears twitched. "What happened?"

"All the credit really must go to your mother's best friend, Violetdust-" Dovesky broke off suddenly and then cleared her throat, as if grief suddenly overtook her, before continuing again in a softer voice. "Sorry. As I was saying, Violetdust was tired of having Swanfrost be too scared to actually *interact* with Frostsky, so she took it into her own paws.

"We'd just suffered through a particularly harsh leafbare, and newleaf was coming. Violetdust suggested the apprentices sneak out to the lake and watch the stars to celebrate. After they got to the beach, she and Sunbounce managed to slip away, leaving your parents alone and, well, the rest is history." Dovesky smiled fondly. "They became mates soon after Swanfrost became a warrior."

"Woah." Violetpaw hummed softly. "I never knew."

"It was lovely, watching your parents grow up and fall in love." Dovesky twitched her pelt. "Now bring that stick up a little higher, will you? There's a tick on my neck that I can't quite reach."

chapter 10

moon meetings

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BRIGHTKIT BECAME BRIGHTPAW in the next week, and the friends were happily reunited. That night, Violetpaw, Sweetpaw, and Brightpaw shared a vole, crouched together like they used to, pelts pressed close to keep warm.

"The territory's amazing," Brightpaw was meowing through a mouthful of prey. "When Fogsky showed me the beach, the lake was freezing over at the edges. It was *so* pretty. I hope it freezes all the way over, that'd be cool to see."

"Yeah, and I'm sure RiverClan will love that," Violetpaw snorted.

"I hope the lake doesn't freeze over." Sweetpaw shivered. "It's already cold enough."

"Speaking of which," the calico apprentice meowed, twitching her ears, "where should I sleep tonight? Ravenpaw told me the apprentices den is out of nests. Please don't make me sleep on the ground."

"No, of course not," Sweetpaw meowed reassuringly. "You can share with Violetpaw or I, and we'll find moss to make you a nest tomorrow morning."

The white she-cat nodded her agreement. "You can share with me, my nest's bigger than Sweetpaw's."

"Plus it's probably warmer," Sweetpaw added distractedly, focusing her attention more on ripping a piece of the vole out. "It's closer to the center, next to Eaglepaw's."

This instantly caught Brightpaw's attention, and she snapped her head up to face Violetpaw with so much speed that the white she-
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cat swore she heard a bone crack. "Oh, really? Is that right?"

"Oops." Sweetpaw blinked at Violetpaw with a sheepish, guilty expression. "Sorry."

"Oh, come on now, do you take me for mousebrained?" Brightpaw waved her tail high up in the air. "I may have only become an apprentice today, but I've been watching. Near Eaglepaw, I know Violetpaw acts... *odder*."

"*Shh*," the white she-cat hissed Brightpaw's way, slapping her friend with her tail lightly, glancing over her shoulder at where Eaglepaw and his sister, Dapplepaw, were sitting. "Keep it down, will you?"

A few moments ago, from the corner of her eye, she'd noticed a patrol returning to camp, thoroughly chilled from the hunt. Ravenpaw was amongst them.

Depositing his catches in the fresh-kill pile, he'd snatched up a mouse before glancing between Eaglepaw and Dapplepaw and the other three apprentices; at last, he seemed to decide that he was better friends with the three she-cats - or, at the very least, with Brightpaw and Sweetpaw - and started towards them.

He reached them just in time to catch the end of Brightpaw's words. "Violetpaw always acts oddly. It's quite concerning, actually."

Violetpaw scowled at him. "Oh, be quiet."

As Ravenpaw stuck his tongue out at her very maturely, Featherpool slipped out from the medicine den. The gray tabby she-cat padded across the camp to Lilystar, who was standing nearby the apprentices, engaged in a conversation with Russetfrost.

Clearly what she had to say wasn't a secret, considering it was loud enough for Violetpaw's curious ears to catch. "I'm leaving now. I've got to get to the half-moon meeting."

Lilystar glanced up at the sky, as though to double check there truly was a half-moon. "Really? I thought you said all the other medicine cats had stopped coming."

"I know, but I thought I'd give it another try," Featherpool mewed with an edge of determination. "Maybe tonight's the night StarClan finally breaks their silence."

The ThunderClan leader nodded. "Alright. Just, if Yellowleaf shows up-"

"I'll be sure to steer as clear of him as I can," Featherpool promised. "I know relationships with SkyClan have been rocky."

Lilystar touched her tail-tip to Featherpool's shoulder gently. "Okay. Good luck."

When the gray tabby medicine cat had gone, Violetpaw turned to face her friends again, only to find that she hadn't been the only one who was watching the exchange. Everyone's eyes tracked Featherpool as she disappeared from camp in a tense, apprehensive way; the topic of StarClan was clearly upsetting in this Clan.

"So they haven't returned yet?" Violetpaw murmured once the normal conversations returned around her again. "StarClan?"

"I guess not," Brightpaw replied, clawing the earth beside the vole as though her appetite had now disappeared. "My mom told me a story about this once, you know. Many, many moons ago, this same thing had happened, and it'd been an intervention of the Dark Forest. Maybe it's the Dark Forest again."

"But I thought there was someone guarding the border." Violetpaw frowned. "Someone's guarding the border between the Dark Forest and StarClan so that never happens again."

"Or maybe StarClan's just mad because we're not getting along with SkyClan," Sweetpaw mewed with a shrug. "That's what Dad thinks. Lilystar and Russetfrost are anticipating war with SkyClan, but Dad's trying to convince them otherwise."

Violetpaw glanced at her sister, briefly surprised at how she knew all this, when Ravenpaw spoke.

"If we have to fight, we'll fight. It's time those SkyClan cats learned their place and quit pushing our borders."

Violetpaw's mouth suddenly felt dry at the mention of war. She wasn't quite sure why, but she felt so close to the idea of death, like it was a truly physical thing that she could just stretch out her legs and touch. And, of course, war meant death, which absolutely terrified her.

Having lost her appetite as well, the white she-cat simply bundled herself closer to Sweetpaw's soft fur for comfort and gazed up at the night sky. A cold gust of wind soon blew by, bringing with it the promise of a harsh leafbare and war.

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AS IT UNSURPRISINGLY TURNED OUT, StarClan didn't answer any of Featherpool's dreams at the half-moon meeting; despite this, the Gathering was still on, and when Russetfrost announced the patrol that afternoon, Violetpaw was pleased to hear that her, Sweetpaw, and Brightpaw's names were called.

The three apprentices couldn't seem to keep their excited chatter controlled that night as they padded to the Gathering Island.

"I've never seen a WindClan cat before," Sweetpaw mewed smartly, as though what she'd just said was a magical discovery. "I wonder if their legs are as longer than mine."

Violetpaw snorted, flicking her sister's ears lightheartedly with her tail. "Everyone's legs are longer than yours," she teased.

"*I've* seen a WindClan cat before," Brightpaw chimed in proudly.

"Really?" The white she-cat blinked at her, unconvinced. "How?"

"Well, I haven't really *seen* one before, but Dad's described one to me, so I basically have."

At the mention of him, Sunbounce, who'd been walking a little ahead of the three apprentices with Whitebird, craned his neck to look at his daughter affectionately. "Are you talking about me back there?"

Violetpaw instantly fell silent when he spoke. Despite him being her
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mentor, there was still that odd barrier between them - that perhaps only she felt and he didn't - that made him seem so formal and professional that it was mean.

Brightpaw grinned up at him. "Nothing bad, I promise."

Sunbounce hummed, before facing towards again. His blue gaze swept the patrol before landing on two cats near the front: the deputy, Russetfrost, and his mate, Blossomsky. His parents. "I'd better go check on them," he murmured quietly to Whitebird. "Violetdust died around these parts. I-"

"I understand," Whitebird replied softly, nudging him. "Go on."

As Sunbounce padded away, Violetpaw glanced over at her friends to find that they'd all gone oddly quiet, like her. Brightpaw's cheerful demeanour seemed to fall a little at the mention of her dead aunt, and Sweetpaw had become weirdly fascinated with a pebble.

So, with that cheerful atmosphere, the ThunderClan patrol crossed the tree bridge onto the Gathering Island.

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sorry, this was a bit of a filler chapter, but i felt that it needed some development time! i haven't written it yet, but hopefully chapter 11 will be more entertaining!

thank you for reading, have an amazing day!!

~ lily
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chapter 11

a crow's warning

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AT FIRST GLANCE, the Gathering felt overwhelming. Countless new scents flood Violetpaw's nose; although she'd marked WindClan and SkyClan's borders countless times, it was odd seeing the cats that carried the scents, along with the new smells of RiverClan and ShadowClan.

As soon as the patrol touched paw onto the island, they immediately dispersed into their own groups, although in a tense nature towards SkyClan. Lilystar made her way to the Great Oak, Featherpool joined the medicine cats near the back, and elders bunched to share stories. Albeit a little nervously, Violetpaw tracked down the group of apprentices.

"Should we go over?" she murmured, gesturing to the bunch of younger cats hanging out near the edges of the island.

"Probably." Sweetpaw shuffled her paws. "Make some new friends, right?"

After a hesitant agreement, the three started to make their way over slowly. As they approached, the conversation came to a clear slow as the apprentices glanced over at the newcomers.

"Hi," Brightpaw chirped once they were near enough. "I'm Brightpaw, and this here is Violetpaw and Sweetpaw."

A brown tabby tom with the scent of pine trees was the one that replied. "Well hello," he greeted. "I'm Brackenpaw, and that's my brother Tigerpaw. That there is Gustpaw of WindClan, Lakepaw of RiverClan-"

"And I'm Sorrelpaw." The last apprentice standing in the group, with
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a smell that Violetpaw easily identified as SkyClan, finished off Brackenpaw's words. She ruffled her ginger fur, blinking slowly at the ThunderClan cats with cold, green eyes.

Violetpaw twitched her tail-tip; the hostility from the ginger apprentice towards the ThunderClan cats was heavy, and she was suddenly regretting coming over here.

"Now, come on Sorrelpaw, don't be like that," Brackenpaw mewed, his voice light-hearted as he gave Sorrelpaw a gentle flick on the ear. Clearly, they were friends, and had met at previous Gatherings. "We're all here to have fun."

The ginger she-cat scoffed, rolling her eyes. "Easy for you to say, you *ShadowClan cat*," she hissed lowly. "You just don't understand anything. But once they target you, your home, your Clanmates"- she shot a deadly look towards the ThunderClan apprentices -"you'll understand."

Violetpaw jerked backwards at those harsh words, her nose wrinkling in confusion. "Just what are you talking about?" She found the words pouring out of her mouth before she could stop them. "What do you mean, ThunderClan's targeting you?"

Clearly, she wasn't the only cat lost as well. The edges of Sweetpaw and Brightpaw's fur had started to ruffle, and the rest of the apprentices looked around with unease.

But Sorrelpaw didn't seem to care about what their spectators felt. She kept her eyes trained on Violetpaw, her lips pulling back into an ugly snarl. "Don't act so innocent," she spat. "My mentor, Oakbounce, has told me all about ThunderClan's evils. You killed his mother."

Violetpaw's tail lashed indignantly. "We haven't killed anybody!" The last war between Clans, involving any deaths, was ages ago, beyond the memory of any living cat. Sorrelpaw must be crazy.

But the ginger she-cat only rolled her eyes again before pushing herself to her paws and padding over to the cluster of SkyClan cats. She'd made her way over to a dark gray tom, who must be that

mentor she mentioned - Oakbounce.

Sorrelpaw re-encountered what had just happened to her mentor in short, quick whispers, and when the two SkyClan cats turned simultaneously to shoot a hostile look towards ThunderClan, Violetpaw felt her eyes narrow with interest.

It was odd, she found herself noting. Their eye colors. Both Oakbounce and Sorrelpaw possessed a green gaze, but when standing side by side in comparison, Oakbounce's was that much sharper. Sorrelpaw's green eyes were the normal shade, but against her mentor's, they looked more than dull. Oakbounce's green was so clear it hurt to look at.

Violetpaw quickly turned away, not wanting to stare any longer. Back at the apprentices' conversation, Brackenpaw was seemingly apologizing for Sorrelpaw's behavior.

"Sorry about her. She's usually not here when the ThunderClan apprentices join us," he was meowing, "don't take it personally. She's decently nice. I mean, if you're not in ThunderClan."

"Oh, that's okay," Brightpaw replied, but due to her voice being an unusually high pitch, Violetpaw figured her friend was fazed from Sorrelpaw's words. "Don't worry about it."

Gustpaw ducked his head in an almost embarrassed way, his blue eyes glittering with curiosity. "So, what'd you guys do?"

Sweetpaw's pelt twitched; a warning. "What?"

Gustpaw seemed to be oblivious to it. "What did you do to SkyClan? Who'd you kill?"

Sweetpaw opened her mouth, clearly about to tell him off. But before she could, a yowl from the Great Oak parted the air. This came from SkyClan's leader, Crowstar, a dark gray tom with amber eyes. His age was clear, though, from the specks of white that grew around his muzzle.

"The Gathering has begun!" he announced.

Instantly after, a hush ran along the cats as they all fell to a silence. Scowling, Sweetpaw shot Gustpaw an irritable look before sitting down, wrapping her tail around her paws. The rest of the apprentices followed, waiting patiently for their leaders to speak.

"Lilystar." Crowstar glanced over at the tortoiseshell she-cat. His expression was difficult to decipher, but it didn't take a genius to figure out that his look didn't hold good means. "Would you like to begin?"

Lilystar's fur ruffled a little at the SkyClan leader's address. Clearly, she hadn't expected him to speak to her at all this Gathering. Slowly, she nodded, pushing herself to her paws. "As the moons tilt into leafbare, the prey come in smaller amounts, but they still run smoothly." She paused, then glanced wryly in Crowstar's direction. "We've been having some issues with our borders-"

Crowstar scoffed, interrupting her.

Lilystar's face pulled into a frown. "I'm sorry, is there an issue?"

"Yes." Crowstar's tail-tip twitched. "You know there is."

Instantly, whispers ran throughout the Gathering. RiverClan, WindClan, and ShadowClan cats looked wildly confused; clearly, this topic hadn't been talked about before. But, based the heavy tension between the SkyClan and ThunderClan cats, everyone was waiting for this moment.

Lilystar raised an eyebrow, ignoring the questioning looks from her fellow leaders. "Well let's hear it, then. I'd love to know why your cats keep trying to push onto our land when they're marking the border."

Crowstar rolled his eyes. "You know it's not about that."

"Well of course it is," Lilystar snapped. Her patience was dwindling. "SkyClan's trying to push onto ThunderClan's territory, you want more land, *that's* what we're discussing here-"

"*No.*" Crowstar's sharp voice cut her off. "We don't want more land."

"*Really?*" Lilystar meowed sarcastically. "Doesn't look that way to me."

Crowstar stood up, lashing his tail. "Well I don't very well care how it looks to you," he hissed. "All SkyClan wants is..." He paused, amber gaze sweeping his audience, and it felt like the entire island was hanging on to his every next words. "All we want is for ThunderClan to admit they're housing a murderer."

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ugh i hate this chapter but i really love writing this book so i just wanted to get something out to push past this scene so we can get to the good stuff if you know what i mean!!

as always, thank you for reading!

~ lily
~~~

chapter 12

the accusation

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FOR A MOMENT, the ThunderClan cats were shocked into silence. Of course, as Violetpaw recalled, there had been a huge murder accusation after Violetdust's death - in fact, right now, from the corner of her eye, she can spot Sunbounce throwing a glance at Stormbird's direction. But it hadn't been something her Clanmates have thought about since then, simply because it was too unpleasant to think about.

Clearly, Lilystar was thinking the same thing, for she let out an uncomfortable laugh. "You're insane, Crowstar."

The SkyClan leader caught on to her unease instantly, and leaned forward like a warrior cornering his prey. "That didn't sound very confident."

"I'm sorry if my disbelief wasn't strong enough," the tortoiseshell retorted. "Just what is wrong with you? What *murderer* do we have?"

A low growl came from Crowstar's throat. "I don't know, but StarClan told me. They told me you were hiding-"

"StarClan?" This time, Lilystar's laugh was truly of disbelief, loud and high. "StarClan hasn't been in contact with us for *over six moons-!*"

"The first visit came before their disappearance," Crowstar spat. "But since, once a moon, I'll get a dream. The same voice in my head, always repeating the same thing-"

"What?" the ThunderClan leader snapped. "What does that fake
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voice in your head say?"

The dark gray tom glared at her. "*StarClan* always tells me this: the Ghost Assassin dwells in ThunderClan."

A long pause drew out this time as everyone ran Crowstar's words through their minds. Violetpaw drew the words *Ghost Assassin* from her memory, the supposed murderer of Ashbird, Crowstar's daughter, and perhaps the killer of Violetdust - though most cats in ThunderClan thought that part as a joke.

And clearly, right now, most cats thought Crowstar was pulling their tail. The heavy, earlier tension started to melt, and many started twitching their whiskers with amusement. Because the Ghost Assassin was *fake*. It was a *nursery tale*. Violetpaw remembered Ravenpaw telling her that much.

"I'm serious!" Crowstar snarled, when he realized that his audience - other than his SkyClan cats - hadn't taken his words to heart. "I mean it-"

"*The Ghost Assassin?*" This came from RiverClan's leader, Dewstar. The brown she-cat's tail-tip twitched in laughter. "Crowstar, that's not real."

"Well of course it is!" Crowstar angrily lashed his tail. "He killed my daughter. He killed Ashbird."

Suddenly, Violetpaw recalled the words Sorrelpaw had spat her way earlier. *'My mentor, Oakbounce, has told me all about ThunderClan's evils. You killed his mother.'*

The white she-cat's eyes widened as she realized what this must mean. Ashbird is Oakbounce's mother.

Trying to stay discrete, she glanced over at Oakbounce. It must be weird, having cats throw your mother's name around like this, to see her slowly become a story character in a nursery tale. But the gray tom held his chin up high, keeping his eyes pinned on Crowstar.

Does all of SkyClan believe that the Ghost Assassin is real, and in

ThunderClan? Violetpaw shivered. *That's delusional.*

Back up on the Great Oak, Lilystar rolled her eyes. "Ashbird went on a walk in leafbare. It was cold and everything was covered in frost, she slipped and fell on her head-"

"A newly made apprentice would not slip and fall on their head," Crowstar hissed, "and I hope you're not expecting me to believe that my daughter would make such a mistake."

"Whatever. These monthly visits from StarClan really sound more like an issue between you and your medicine cat than decrees," Lilystar scoffed. "If you have nothing else to say, if I may be allowed to continue my report-"

"Give the Ghost Assassin up," Crowstar interrupted with a snarl. "Give him up so that I can finally avenge my daughter's death."

Lilystar laughed again, though this time it was much more annoyed and cold, and swept her tail out to her patrol. "I don't know who he is. But you're welcome to him, if you have an identity."

Violetpaw followed Crowstar's hostile gaze over to her Clanmates. The idea that any of them had killed a SkyClan cat from years ago was absurd. Her mentor, and Brightpaw's father, Sunbounce; his mate, Whitebird; Stormbird, a cat who seemed to be a hard worker and most accepted as innocent; the deputy Russetfrost, and his mate Blossomsky, a kind she-cat whose eyes could never shake a certain heavy sadness.

On and on she went, until she reached her own parents, Swanfrost and Frostsky, sitting near the edges. Though Frostsky had a positively fed up and annoyed look on his face towards Crowstar, his hard expression softened a little as Swanfrost pressed herself closer to him for warmth in the cold night.

How could any of *them* be the Ghost Assassin?

Crowstar scanned them, though he clearly didn't have a name. Finally, he turned back to Lilystar. "I don't know, but I do know this: if the Ghost Assassin turns himself in, SkyClan will stop

pushing borders. Otherwise, we will show no mercy and kindness to any ThunderClan cat."

"What does that mean?" WindClan's leader, Breezestar, meowed. "A war?"

Lilystar's eyes sharpened. "That's ridiculous, Crowstar," she snapped when the SkyClan leader didn't deny it. "A war over a nursery tale - do you know how many lives we could lose over something as stupid as this?"

Crowstar shook his head. "We won't lose any lives if you turn the Ghost Assassin in to me."

"Oh, for StarClan's sake-!"

"SkyClan is leaving." Crowstar pushed himself to his paws coldly, then beckoned to his patrol. "I'm sorry it had to explode like this, Lilystar, but it had to be said. Better said now than to keep it for many more moons. I know you've been worrying over border issues, and now you know what we want. It's a fair trade."

The tortoiseshell she-cat narrowed her eyes. "All I know is that we don't have the Ghost Assassin, and over my dead body will you push into our territory because of some fake dreams."

Crowstar growled, but chose to end the conversation there. "Snowbird," he called to his deputy. "Gather the patrol, please."

Without another word, the SkyClan leader leaped off the Great Oak neatly, and led his cats out into the moonlit night.

As soon as he was gone, the rest of the cats burst into furious whispers. Gustpaw turned to the ThunderClan apprentices again with a curious smirk, but Sweetpaw shot him down quickly with a glare.

All throughout this, the full moon glared down brightly on them, almost unnaturally; StarClan must really be gone. From what Violetpaw had been told, they should've shown that they're displeased by clouding the moon.

"ThunderClan will now be leaving as well." Lilystar turned to the other leaders. "I hope you understand."

"Of course," Dewstar mewed, a nervous little smile on her face.

Russetfrost moved quickly in collecting his cats, and as he did so, Frostsky crossed the island towards Violetpaw, Sweetpaw, and Brightpaw.

"Come on, kits," he murmured when he reached them, sweeping them with his tail. "It's time to go. Brightpaw, I think your parents are looking for you."

"Okay," the calico replied, bounding away after she mumbled an unfocused goodbye to the other Clans' apprentices.

Violetpaw and Sweetpaw did the same, before following Frostsky towards their Clanmates.

"Dad," Violetpaw started when they'd reached Swanfrost, and she gave both her kits licks on the ear. "Dad, there's not really a Ghost Assassin, is there?"

She'd asked this question to both Ravenpaw and Sunbounce, but never once to her parents. She was interested in what they had to say, but as it turns out, Frostsky's answer was remarkably similar to the ones she'd received previously.

Her father thought about it. Then, "Not as far as I know."

chapter 13

ignorance

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WHEN THE THUNDERCLAN PATROL returned to camp, the air between everyone was tense. It was only because she was near the front of the patrol, next to Lilystar, that Violetpaw caught her leader's words, low and murmured into Russetfrost's ear.

"Send the apprentices to their den, then go wake the warriors. We're to have a Clan meeting."

Russetfrost twitched his pelt. "Right now?"

"SkyClan has practically declared war on us," Lilystar replied, stalking over to the Highledge and leaping onto it. "What else are we to do?"

The deputy's face was grim when he nodded once, then moved to carry out his leader's orders. Violetpaw, Sweetpaw, and Brightpaw were soon ushered into the apprentices den, and as they begrudgingly went, tired and sleepy warriors started padding out into the clearing.

Once they were inside, Violetpaw glanced at her friends, her jaw opening then closing, unasked questions at the tip of her tongue. Her biggest question hung in the air, and Sweetpaw voiced it for her.

"What in StarClan's name just happened?"

Brightpaw shook her head, as though she just couldn't wrap her mind around the event. "Crowstar's lying. He must be. Nobody in ThunderClan is a *killer*."

"Yeah," Violetpaw mumbled. "Yeah, no, I guess not."
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As the three friends stood there, not sure what else to say but too energized to go to sleep, Ravenpaw's voice suddenly broke the heavy silence.

"Great StarClan, can you keep it down?"

Instantly, the white she-cat glared over at him. Ravenpaw, who was in his nest, had rolled upwards so that now his yellow eyes were beaming at them like light in the dark.

"Sorry-" Brightpaw started.

"No, not you," Ravenpaw mewed, waving her apology off. "*Violetpaw's* the one yowling like a fox in a fit."

"*Me?*" Violetpaw gaped at him, lashing her tail. "I've barely said anything!"

The black tom rolled his eyes. "Well, *you're* the one whose voice woke me up. There are cats sleeping in here, you know."

"Whatever. Go back to sleep, then," Violetpaw spat at him, before turning around and flopping herself at the entrance. Her heartbeat and mind was running way too fast for her to get any rest tonight, and she found herself stretching out her ears to try and listen to the discussions of the warriors.

"I can't. You've woken me up, and it takes *forever* for me to fall back asleep."

"Marvelous. Now go tell someone who cares."

"Stop bickering." This was Sweetpaw, who plopped herself next to Violetpaw, joining her sister in eavesdropping on the Clan meeting. Though, neither of them could hear much with the den being so far away. "Otherwise you're going to wake Eaglepaw and Dapplepaw."

A pause. Then, Ravenpaw mewed, "What are you two doing over there?"

Violetpaw, who was thoroughly annoyed now, whipped her head around to hiss at him, "Use your head and make an inference,

mousebrain."

"Hey." Ravenpaw's face tugged into a mock frown as he pretended to be upset. "I'm hurt."

"Be quiet," Violetpaw snapped. "Your loud voice is covering what Lilystar's saying. I can't hear her with you talking."

"I doubt you could hear much in the first place," the black tom muttered. "So, what happened at the Gathering tonight? It must be bad if Lilystar's holding a meeting."

Violetpaw faced away from him firmly, refusing to reply. In the end, it was Brightpaw who swooped in to answer, breaking down tonight's events for him. Ravenpaw's response was much like the other ones tonight.

"The Ghost Assassin?" Violetpaw can tell by his confused voice that the black tom's eyes have narrowed. "But that's a kit's tale."

"Yeah," Brightpaw mewed, agreeing. "Crowstar's gone crazy."

Just then, the sound of moss rustling came from near the end of the den, and Eaglepaw's sleepy voice filled the den. "Hey, what's going on?"

At the sound of his voice, Violetpaw suddenly felt herself tense, her pelt heating, and she did her best not to look behind her shoulder as the moss in Eaglepaw's nest rustled, indicating that the brown tom had pushed himself upwards into a sitting position.

None of the four were that close with Eaglepaw, so an awkward silence stretched out in the den as Violetpaw, Sweetpaw, Brightpaw, and Ravenpaw tried to silently signal each other to answer the older apprentice's question.

In the end, Violetpaw cleared her throat. "Lilystar's holding a Clan meeting." She winced quietly to herself as her voice came back oddly high to her ear.

"Really?" Eaglepaw yawned, still trying to fully wake himself, recent sleep still holding on strong. Great StarClan, his yawn is cute. Great

StarClan, what was she *thinking*?

"Yeah." Before she knew it, the words were coming out of her mouth in a blur. "At the Gathering, Crowstar accused ThunderClan of being murderers. Well, not all of us, I guess. Just one. He thinks that the Ghost Assassin is a ThunderClan cat, and-"

"You ignored me when I asked, but you'll fill Eaglepaw in." Ravenpaw rolled his eyes. "Real nice, Violetpaw."

The white she-cat's tail lashed in defense. "Maybe I wouldn't have ignored you if you asked nicer, like Eaglepaw did."

"Eaglepaw didn't even *ask*." Ravenpaw twitched his pelt, then rolled his eyes again. "Whatever. I'm going to sleep."

Eaglepaw blinked, albeit a little awkwardly, as the black tom stormed past him to his nest. "Sorry. Did I do something?"

Violetpaw flushed. "No, no, of course not. I don't know why he's acting like someone put bees in his nest."

Thankfully, the brown apprentice didn't seem upset, and offered her an easy smile. "Well, I should get back to sleep. It's getting late, and Russetfrost has got me on dawn patrol tomorrow morning."

"Oh!" Violetpaw's tail lifted into the air, embarrassed. "Oh, yes. Sorry for keeping you up. And waking you."

"Don't be," Eaglepaw mewed lightly as he picked his way over to his nest.

As soon as his head was reburied in the moss of his nest, Sweetpaw and Brightpaw's heads whipped to face Violetpaw with a suggestive look on their faces.

"You *so* like him," the calico whispered as she stepped past the sisters towards her nest.

"No I don't!" Violetpaw hissed in reply, afraid that Eaglepaw had overhead, despite the fact that Brightpaw's voice was quiet enough and the brown tom's nest was far enough to avoid such a thing.

Sweetpaw only smiled at her knowingly.

Grumbling to herself, Violetpaw turned firmly towards her, facing the night again, flicking her ears to try and listen to the Clan meeting. However, as she did so, she found her heart beating faster than before. Though only by a little, she made sure to tell herself.

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i already know who i want her to end up with, but do you guys like eaglepaw or ravenpaw better?

make sure to drink water today!

~ lily
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chapter 14

greencough

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DESPITE SKYCLAN'S SCARY threat, there were no attacks. In fact, it seemed as though SkyClan were simply icing ThunderClan out and giving them the silent treatment.

They appeared at Gatherings, though Crowstar would never look Lilystar's way nor speak to her. SkyClan kept closely to themselves, looking right past any ThunderClan cat unless they got too close - then, there would be a scuffle until the two Clans were pulled apart. Violetpaw spotted Sorrelpaw once or twice, standing besides her mentor Oakbounce, her tail whisking through the air.

They never saw SkyClan at the borders anymore. It was like SkyClan had completely redone their border patrol schedule to avoid bumping into ThunderClan cats. When a ThunderClan border patrol passed by, SkyClan's side would always have been already marked.

And, of course, SkyClan's pushing on borders never ceased. Often, border patrols would find that their neighboring Clan had marked trees or rocks clearly on ThunderClan's side of the border, and in an outrage, cats would demand an attack. However, Lilystar, who was looking desperately to avoid war, would always deny them.

"Let them push our borders if they'd like," she'd meow. "In the end, we know what's ours and what's theirs. They're the ones acting like kits. We won't stoop to their level or respond when they're so obviously trying to get a reaction."

Violetpaw, like all her fellow apprentices, felt a rush of pride when it came to defending her Clan. But it was her leader's orders not to engage or react, and despite all the grumblings and decrease of prey that leafbare brought, life wasn't too bad.
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In fact, trouble didn't truly begin until the Clans were deep into leafbare. Sunbounce had taken Violetpaw out on a training session early that morning, and as the white she-cat engaged in the drills he'd set for her for the umpteenth time, Swanfrost rounded into Grassy Hollow.

Violetpaw paused momentarily in her drills, her eyes lighting up when she spotted her mother's soft gray pelt. "Mom!"

Sunbounce bore an expression of great confusion, but flicked his tail warmly in greeting all the same. The two were good friends, after all. "Swanfrost? What're you doing here?"

Swanfrost's blue eyes looked troubled, sucking in a deep breath as she spoke. "It's your mother."

Instantly, the ginger tom froze. "What's wrong? Is she okay?"

Sunbounce's mother, Blossomsky, had recently developed a cold that was serious enough for her to be moved into the medicine den. The dappled white she-cat was a senior warrior, about to become an elder; her deteriorating health was a subject of great concern recently for her family, as Violetpaw had heard from Brightpaw.

"Featherpool sent me to come find you. She thought I would understand better-" Swanfrost broke off, wincing. "Blossomsky was coughing up blood this morning, Sunbounce. It's greencough."

Violetpaw had been told once that greencough was the illness that took Sunbounce's late sister, Honeykit, when she was young. Apparently, his parents had never stopped grieving her, and the whole family was tense on the subject of the disease.

Thus, a sheer look of horror overtook Sunbounce's face. "Featherpool will heal her, right? She's got catmint."

Swanfrost hesitated. "You'll have to ask her. I'm not exactly sure-"

That's as far as the gray she-cat got before Sunbounce was on his paws, bounding away into the forest and towards camp, calling a hasty, "Violetpaw, we'll finish the drills later," over his shoulder.

As Violetpaw gazed after him, she felt her pelt twitch with worry. She wasn't even sure why. She'd hardly spoken more than a word to Blossomsky her whole life, but hearing about the dappled warrior's sick state felt like a stab to the gut, as though it were *her* mother laying ill in the medicine den.

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BLOSSOMSKY DIDN'T GET much better. The catmint Featherpool had collected at the start of leafbare had dried out, and did little for the senior warrior's health. A week later, after realizing there was nothing else she could possibly do, the gray tabby medicine cat set off to visit the other Clans and see whether or not they had catmint to spare.

"Steer clear of SkyClan," Lilystar warned before she left.

Featherpool waved her off her concerns. "I will."

She set off at sunhigh, leaving the afternoon open for Sunbounce to take Violetpaw training or hunting. However, for the past week, the ginger tom has been nothing but worried, and always stayed in or near camp in case something was to go wrong with Blossomsky.

So, thankfully (and Violetpaw meant that with maximum sarcasm), Ravenpaw's mentor, Icedust, offered to take her on a hunting trip that day.

Violetpaw's eyes almost popped out of her head when Sunbounce told her. "But what about Stormbird or Fogsky?" she asked, naming Sweetpaw and Brightpaw's mentors. "Aren't they going out?"

"They're doing some combat training, and you need hunting practice," Sunbounce replied, whisking his tail. "Now go on."

Icedust and Ravenpaw were waiting for her by the entrance, and - a little gloomily - Violetpaw padded over, the black apprentice wearing a sour and displeased expression on his face. However, Icedust seemed completely oblivious to the tension between the two apprentices, and simply twitched his pelt before leading them out into the forest, a cat of little words himself.
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Violetpaw and Ravenpaw hadn't spoken much since after that night in the apprentices den after the Gathering. Typically, their scuffles would occur because of the black tom; he would be the one to purposely approach and annoy her. He would be the one to come sit with her and her friends for a meal, even though he knew she wanted nothing more than for him to go away.

It seemed that that night had changed something in Ravenpaw. Now, he isolated himself, sitting alone for meals (his parents or Brightpaw at most for company). He was also noticeably more rude to Violetpaw; though he'd never been particularly nice to her before, now his insults felt more harsh and rigid, as though she were an enemy cat from SkyClan.

For some reason - and this, she felt briefly, followed by great self-scolding - she felt a bit lonely without Ravenpaw bothering her.

The black tom's attitude towards Eaglepaw was also sour. This, Violetpaw really wished he would stop. As far as she knew, Eaglepaw thought she and Ravenpaw were friends, and Ravenpaw's nasty words were going to make the brown apprentice think poorly of her.

Icedust led the two into a clearing and halted. "Now, I'm sure you both know how to hunt. That much is expected. But, with your Warrior Assessments rapidly approaching, I think it's time that we practice some pair hunting."

Instantly, both apprentices' pelts fluffed with protest.

"*Pair hunting?!*" Violetpaw mewed in disbelief.

At the same time, Ravenpaw lashed his tail and shook his head. "You can't be serious!"

"Come on, now." Icedust gave them a firm look. "It's very important to know how to work well with others. It'll be on your test."

"I *can* work with others," the black tom retorted, "I just can't work with *her*. She stomps around the forest like a fox, prey can hear her coming from camp! And, her pelt won't blend with the territory."

Violetpaw sneered at him, fed up with his attitude. "It's leafbare now, mousebrain. If anything, my fur will hide me better in the snow than yours!"

Ravenpaw gaped at her. "It hasn't snowed yet! There's *no snow* anywhere!"

The white apprentice ignored him. "Plus, it's not like I want you has a hunting partner anyway. Your aim is always off when you jump. Honestly, prey have no need to hide from you. Even if a mouse was climbing all over your paws, you'd slap at it and still miss."

Ravenpaw growled, but before he could shoot a retort, Icedust stopped them.

"Ravenpaw, Violetpaw, stop bickering." The gray tom's voice was sharp. "You two are both halfway, or more than halfway, through your apprenticeship. You'll become warriors soon, and this is not the attitude warriors have. Is that understood?"

The two apprentices nodded, though their glares at each other were no less lethal.

"Now, as you've both mentioned, it is leafbare. It's freezing, and the sun will be going down soon. I'd like to get some prey for the Clan before it becomes too cold to be out." Icedust waved his tail, as though shooing kits. "Go on, now. I won't be far, yowl if you need me."

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filler chapter, i'm sorry :')

i just wanted to say thank you for all the support on this book so far!! when i first began writing it, i had motivation to write that i haven't had in ages, and i really liked the plot and characters i came up with! i'm just very glad that you guys are enjoying it too!

have an amazing day!!

~ lily
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chapter 15

skyclan's surprise

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OBEDIENTLY, the two turned and padded out of the clearing, a stiff silence lingering between them. Wordlessly, Violetpaw parted her jaws, tasting the air. "I don't smell anything."

Ravenpaw scoffed. "I'm not surprised. Your nose has never been a strong suit." He ignored her seething glare, and instead flicked his tail to a patch of nearby bushes. "There's a vole under there. You go around and chase it to me."

"Why don't *you* go around and chase it to *me*?" Violetpaw hissed. "You said I can't stalk, remember? Plus, you're the one that always misses the catches."

"I never miss my catches!" Ravenpaw growled. "Listen, my Warrior Assessment is coming up first, plus Icedust is my mentor, so I'm in charge. Go chase it."

The white apprentice huffed, but eventually obliged, moving around the bush, ready to scare the vole. However, her head was spinning with anger from her argument with Ravenpaw, and so wasn't particularly careful when creeping around; thus, she shifted onto a twig, which cracked easily in its brittle state.

"You mousebrain!" Ravenpaw mewed, lashing his tail as they heard the mouse's paws scuttling. "You scared it!"

"Yeah, well"- Violetpaw tried playing off her mistake, though her pelt was burning with embarrassment -"scaring it was my job, isn't it?"

Ravenpaw's fur bristled with annoyance, but he didn't have the chance to bite anything back before the brown pelt of the vole
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streaked out from beneath the bush. He jumped, but - perhaps also unfocused - missed by a mouse tail, his claws snagging a tuft of the vole's fur and nothing else.

"You missed!" Violetpaw narrowed her eyes. "Who's the mousebrain now?"

"*Shut it*," Ravenpaw hissed, leaping onto his paws and bounding after the vole.

The poor vole, with it being leafbare after all, found no shelter. The leafbare ground was bare, and as it scurried on, Violetpaw and Ravenpaw darted after it. Prey was hard to come across, and there was no way they'd let this one get away. Plus, both were determined to catch it because of their pride; they had to prove the other one wrong.

The vole put up a good fight, but finally, Ravenpaw - who'd always been faster than Violetpaw - jumped forward with a mighty leap. His claws caught the creature's tail, and Violetpaw quickly finished the job with a nip to the vole's spine. Finally, it lay there, limp and dead.

"All that," she panted, her ears flicking back and forth in annoyance, "for a skinny piece of prey that can barely feed a kit."

Ravenpaw shrugged, looking much more relaxed now that he'd been the one to trap the vole. "We should be thankful for any prey StarClan gives us."

"All I'm saying is, it shouldn't have taken that much effort," Violetpaw grumbled. "And it wouldn't have, if you hadn't insisted that I chase it to you."

He rolled his eyes. "We got it at the end, that's all that matters. We should get this back to Icedust."

"Hey, why should you be the one who gets to carry the prey?" Violetpaw mewed as Ravenpaw crouched down to pick up the vole. "It'll look like *you* did most of the work."

"Because I did do most of the work," he answered easily.

Tired of arguing, the white apprentice shook out her pelt. "Fine, whatever. But I'm not waiting for you." True to her word, she stood up and trotted off, padding past the trees that her and Ravenpaw had been standing by.

However, as she went, it suddenly occurred to her now near she and Ravenpaw were to SkyClan's border. The clearing Icedust was at was already close, but the vole chase had brought them right up to it.

"Violetpaw." This was Ravenpaw's voice, muffled from the vole, coming from behind her. "Where'd you go? Icedust will be mad if we return separately."

The white apprentice opened her mouth to call out her location, but as she did so, a sudden new scent flooded her tongue. Tangy. Metallic. Impossible to miss in the barren landscape of ThunderClan's leafbare territory.

Blood.

Ravenpaw's voice felt like it was getting further and further now as Violetpaw focused in on this blood. Paws trembling, she started towards it, feeling a heavy, heavy weight in her with each step she took. As she neared, speckles of red dotted the frosted ground.

When she finally pushed past the bristled bushes to get a full view of the scene, her blood ran cold. She had no memory of this, but she must've shrieked, for Ravenpaw was soon at her side, meowing, "What? What is it?" until he caught sight of it himself.

It was Featherpool, their medicine cat who embodied nothing but peace and kindness, laying unmoving in a pool of crimson.

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LILYSTAR'S ATTEMPTS AT PEACE BROKE. As soon as Nightspirit, WindClan's medicine cat, finished his work on Featherpool (by some miracle, she was still alive when Icedust, Violetpaw, and Ravenpaw got her back to camp), Lilystar called a Clan meeting.

"We have to attack!"
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"We can't let them do this to our medicine cat!"

"Featherpool had every right to collect catmint off their land!"

"Those mangepelts!"

"I agree, with all of you." Lilystar's voice rose above the rest as she tried calming her cats. "But we need a sensible plan. We can't just march to their camp."

But despite her words, her eyes were flaming with anger. Featherpool was a close, longtime friend of hers, and it wasn't long before Lilystar dismissed everyone and gathered the senior warriors into her den so that they could come up with a strategy.

Throughout all this chaos, Violetpaw had barely been able to see her friends. In fact, it was Ravenpaw who stood next to her when they brought Featherpool into camp, her blood seeping into Violetpaw's fur.

Spirits, that feeling.

Featherpool's blood had long been washed off from Violetpaw and Ravenpaw's pelts, but the sticky, oozing sensation could never be licked away.

The white apprentice shivered. She wanted to scrub herself from top to bottom, dunk herself into the lake though the thought of getting wet made her want to puke - anything to get the feeling of Featherpool's blood off her.

It was Ravenpaw who shot her an understanding look back then, and Ravenpaw who did the same thing now. Ravenpaw who also had Clanmates attack him with questions, and Ravenpaw who also had thyme forced down his throat. It was Ravenpaw who was still by her side now, both sitting a little numbly as they watched Lilystar call, run, then dismiss the Clan meeting.

Finally, Violetpaw inhaled deeply, and flicked her tail. "Crazy, isn't it?"

Beside her, she felt the black tom puff out a breath. "Yeah-"

"Great StarClan, what happened?"

Violetpaw couldn't take another *What happened?* question, but this one came from Brightpaw. The calico bounded towards them as soon as the Clan meeting was over, her blue eyes rounded with worry.

"We found Featherpool at SkyClan's border," Ravenpaw answered, before Violetpaw had the chance to even open her mouth. "They attacked her when she was searching for catmint, then dumped her body by our border. They're foxhearts."

Brightpaw nodded, twitching her pelt. "Yeah," she breathed. "Are you-" She broke off, glancing over at Violetpaw. "Are you two okay?"

"We're fine," the white she-cat mewed. "It's Featherpool that's hurt."

"Right. But seeing something like that must've been awful, wasn't it?"

As Ravenpaw started to reply, Violetpaw suddenly felt a wave of fatigue rush over her. The last thing she wanted to do right now was go into all these details again. "I'm going to go to sleep. Do you know where Sweetpaw is?"

Brightpaw shrugged. "Waiting for you in the apprentices den, I think."

Violetpaw nodded, and as she started to make her way over, she realized that Brightpaw didn't seem to be following. Stopping, she glanced over her shoulder to give the calico a questioning look.

"Oh, I'll be there in a second," Brightpaw meowed. "I just want to hear more about what happened."

Violetpaw glanced over at Ravenpaw. He seemed quite tired himself, but didn't protest to the idea of staying out longer to answer the same questions for the umpteenth time for Brightpaw.

The white she-cat frowned, but didn't say anything as she turned and padded over to the apprentices den. Brightpaw and Ravenpaw

had always been friends, but never had the calico chosen his company over Violetpaw's.

Hmm, odd.

chapter 16

enemy lands

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NIGHTSPIRIT CAME EVERY DAY to check up on Featherpool and Blossomsky. The silver tabby medicine cat was still weak, and it was Nightspirit's goal to make sure Featherpool avoided catching Blossomsky's disease.

"But what about Blossomsky?" Russetfrost had approached the WindClan medicine cat one evening. Nightspirit was getting ready to head back to his camp for the night, along with a load of prey that ThunderClan offered as their thanks. "Is there anything you can do for her?"

The two toms were at the medicine den's entrance, speaking quietly to each other, but Violetpaw was nearby sharing tongues with Sweetpaw. Both apprentices' ears perked up to listen in.

Nightspirit had hesitated before answering. "I'm not sure," he mewed at last. "She's on a deadly stage of greencough. I've done everything I can, but without catmint-" He inhaled sharply. "All my supply had dried up when Featherpool came to ask me, and I assume that none of the other Clans had anything either if she was desperate enough to approach SkyClan's territory."

Russetfrost's tail-tip twitched at this. "SkyClan has catmint?"

"If any Clan does, they would be the one." Nightspirit shifted on his paws. "They've got that abandoned Twoleg nest and the greenleaf Twolegplace, so they've got a greater supply. Plus, Yellowleaf tends to stock more catmint than the rest of us. However"- he winced -"with the relationship with SkyClan right now, I doubt that they'll be willing to share any."

Russetfrost shook his head. "Couldn't you ask for some, then bring it
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here? They would share with WindClan, wouldn't they?"

"Yeah, but I bet Crowstar would demand to see the sick patient first to make sure it's a WindClan cat before handing me any catmint." Nightspirit blinked at him, then bent down to pick up the prey ThunderClan had given him. "Sorry."

As he padded away, leaving the ThunderClan deputy utterly devastated, Violetpaw suddenly felt a tug of anxiety at the bottom of her stomach. Blossomsky had to get better, she just had to.

She wasn't quite sure why she felt so strongly about the dappled warrior's health, but there was a tingle in her paws that told her that she had to do something.

"Hey, Sweetpaw, did you hear that?" the white she-cat mewed once Russetfrost had gone as well. "SkyClan might have catmint."

Her sister blinked back at her with wide green eyes, slicing sharply through the night. "Yeah, I heard."

"We need to get it somehow," Violetpaw decided. "Blossomsky can't die from *greencough*."

"Well, now that Russetfrost knows, I'm sure he'll tell Lilystar, and she can speak with Crowstar about it."

"You heard what Nightspirit said," Violetpaw replied. "Crowstar would rather Blossomsky die than give it to us."

The gray tabby shrugged. "Then we'll fight."

"Yeah, but that could take *moons*." The white apprentice's tail-tip twitched anxiously. "Blossomsky won't stand a chance by then."

Sweetpaw brushed her tail against Violetpaw's flanks comfortingly. "I know it's awful, but it's up to StarClan now."

There it was again. That flash of annoyance when StarClan was mentioned. But Violetpaw swallowed roughly and pushed it down. "Yeah. You're right."

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THE NEXT MORNING, Violetpaw was assigned to dawn patrol. Grumbling with displeasure, she pushed herself up from her warm nest into the frosty, cold air and padded outside along with Brightpaw and Ravenpaw. They were the ones *actually* assigned to dawn patrol; Violetpaw wasn't sure which mentor she was tagging along with. All she knew was that she'd hardly spoken to her own mentor at all in the past week.

"Hey." Ravenpaw's voice, deep with sleep, broke through the early leafbare morning. It took a second for Violetpaw to realize he wasn't addressing her, but rather Brightpaw. "How're you holding up?"

"Oh." The calico took a shaky breath. "I'm alright, I suppose. I hope Blossomsky gets better, but it doesn't seem like-" She broke off, before shaking out her pelt as though in an attempt to calm herself. "Dad's the one that's really going through it."

Violetpaw thought briefly about this. Russetfrost was, of course, Blossomsky's mate, but it truly seemed to be Sunbounce whose personality shifted the most. Russetfrost had always had this sort of dead, lifeless look in his eyes - similar to those of Blossomsky's - but Sunbounce's had always been full of fiery life. Never had she seen the ginger tom's eyes so faded, so similar to his parents'.

"Is he doing okay?" Violetpaw asked, flicking her tail as she turned around to glance at Brightpaw.

"Hmm?" Brightpaw's blinked, as though she'd forgotten Violetpaw was there. She'd been doing that a lot, the white she-cat noticed, when Ravenpaw was around. She'd also been ditching Violetpaw and Sweetpaw more often, preferring to share her meals with the black tom instead. "Oh, yeah. He doesn't eat much, but Mom can usually get him to keep down half a mouse."

The three padded over to the group of warriors by the entrance, all muttering to themselves about the cold and sleep. Once the apprentices had reached them, Brightpaw's mentor, Fogsky, whisked his tail. "Alright, then. Shall we go?"
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Violetpaw felt oddly disassociated from the patrol as she followed them over to WindClan's border. As the warriors conversed amongst themselves, and Brightpaw and Ravenpaw chattered in front of her, she felt her attention focused mainly on her paws, mind deep in the Blossomsky situation.

By the time WindClan's border was done and the patrol looped around to SkyClan's, Violetpaw had a sense of impulsiveness. All she knew was that Blossomsky needed catmint, SkyClan had catmint, and as she stood by the border - freshly marked from SkyClan's earlier dawn patrol - she suddenly felt that it would be incredibly easy to step over it.

"Let's get this done fast so we can go back," Fogsky meowed. "Foxbounce, Icedust, mark that section over there. Ivydust and I will stay here. And can I trust you apprentices to take care of the border from that tree and beyond?"

Violetpaw thought of poor Blossomsky, coughing up blood all night, unable to have her family members visit her on her last days. How uncomfortable she must be, forced to quarantine. She thought of Russetfrost, a lifeless but smart deputy who couldn't afford another loss. She thought of Sunbounce, of how the spirit inside her mentor seemed to be fading away.

Then finally, she thought of Swanfrost. If it were her mother laying in that medicine den, she knew what she would do.

She'd made up her mind.

"You guys take this part over here," Violetpaw mewed distractedly once they'd reached the tree. "I'll get the end section."

Without waiting for their response, she trotted off, making sure that there were several bushes worth of distance between her and Ravenpaw and Brightpaw before she stopped.

She took a deep breath, gazing out into SkyClan's dark forest. There wouldn't be any enemy cats around at this time. Their patrol had already gone by, and it was too early for any hunting patrols or to train apprentices.

She lifted one paw. Then, slowly, slowly, she started to set it down across the border, nervously and tentatively, as though SkyClan's ground would burn her. Slowly, slowly...

"Violetpaw."

The white she-cat yelped at the sound of Ravenpaw's voice, spinning around to glare at the black tom. "What? What do you want?"

Ravenpaw twitched his tail-tip, rolling off her hostile tone easily. "The patrol's beginning to head back-" He cut off, suddenly giving the air an indignant sniff. "You didn't mark your section of the border at all?"

Violetpaw lashed her tail. "I was just *about to*."

"Well, it really shouldn't have taken you this long," Ravenpaw commented - unnecessarily, in Violetpaw's opinion.

She rolled her eyes. "Well you weren't marking your part alone, were you?" She looked behind him, only to find that he was short of the calico apprentice. "Where is Brightpaw, anyways? I thought you two were attached at the tail."

Ravenpaw shrugged. "I told her I had to make some dirt. She unattached our tails pretty quickly after that."

Violetpaw blinked at him, an insuppressible feeling of horrified amusement beginning to rise inside her. "Spirits, really?"

"No," Ravenpaw answered, grinning. "Fogsky wanted to talk to her, so he sent me to come get you."

The white she-cat turned around, facing SkyClan's territory again, her tail-tip twitching with annoyance at the fact that her face was beginning to curl with laughter. "You're not funny."

"Aw, now, that's just mean," Ravenpaw mewed, his voice heavy with a tone of teasing sarcasm. A pause, then, "Alright, come on, hurry up and mark the border so we can return to camp."

Violetpaw kept her back firmly faced to him. For some reason, she felt that if he saw her face, he'd immediately know what she was planning to do, and she didn't want someone trying to stop her. "Er, you go back first. I'll finish up here then join you."

Even though he couldn't see her expression, there must be something about her tone that caught his attention, for Ravenpaw's voice turned cautious when he spoke again. "Violetpaw." He drew out the syllables of her name slowly. "What are you-?"

She didn't know why this was the thing that set her off. But before Ravenpaw could finish his sentence, Violetpaw sprinted across the border into SkyClan's territory, leaving a stunned black tom behind.

chapter 17

brink of death

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THE WHITE SHE-CAT'S HEART thumped loudly in her chest as she ran, darting through the thickets of SkyClan's land. Her legs trembled beneath her; she couldn't believe she was actually doing this. She can't believe she actually did this. She was on enemy territory.

If they hurt Featherpool to the brink of death, Violetpaw didn't even want to imagine what they'd do to her. But she had to do this. For Blossomsky.

Suddenly, she heard the sound of thumping pawsteps behind her. Fear pulsed through Violetpaw's body, her veins turning ice cold, and she barely managed a glance behind her shoulder. Has SkyClan found her already?

However, all she saw was Ravenpaw's black pelt, charging behind her. "Violetpaw, Violetpaw!" His voice was kept at a low hiss, ears pressed to the top of his head. "Are you insane? What are you doing?"

"Blossomsky needs catmint," Violetpaw shot back, before veering right sharply, bounding away from the lakeside and upwards, towards the abandoned Twoleg nest by SkyClan's camp. If she was lucky, she might find catmint there.

Ravenpaw followed, and soon his long strides caught up to her. "This is crazy, you're going to get yourself killed."

"Blossomsky's sick," is all Violetpaw responded. Why didn't Ravenpaw understand? She seemed to feel some odd, motherly bond to the dappled warrior that nobody else but Sunbounce did - weird, considering she's hardly spoken more than a word to
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Blossomsky in her entire life. But she couldn't help it.

"Stop, just stop. We can find catmint elsewhere. Now come on, let's turn around before we get killed-"

"How about you turn around before you get killed," the white apprentice mewed sharply. "I'm not leaving until I've got catmint."

"This is ridiculous-!"

But Violetpaw ignored him, and instead tried lengthening her strides to pull ahead. Annoyingly enough, he easily kept up with her, and also, annoyingly enough, refused to leave. She hated that he was trying to talk her out of this, and she hated even more that she was about to give in.

However, Violetpaw only had to remind herself that Blossomsky needed this before any lingering doubt faded from her stomach. Still, she was so wrapped up in her mind - Ravenpaw's words, Blossomsky, SkyClan, catmint - that she almost didn't notice they were at the Twoleg den until Ravenpaw came to a stop.

Ravenpaw shot her a glare with his yellow gaze. "Go on, quickly then, grab the catmint."

Violetpaw blinked a little helplessly at the scene. The Twoleg nest looked empty enough, with a patch of foliage covered by frost, where she assumed the catmint would reside. Only, she had one, small issue that she didn't consider before she did this.

"I don't know what catmint looks like."

Ravenpaw's head whipped towards her with a look of pure disbelief in his eyes. "You're kidding."

"No."

He rolled his eyes. "It's a tall, leafy plant that smells really good."

Now it was Violetpaw's turn to twitch her tail-tip at him. "Now you're kidding. How in the world am I meant to find an herb based on that description?"

"I don't know, I'm not a medicine cat," Ravenpaw hissed back. "You should've figured it out before pulling a mousebrained stunt like this-"

"Let's just grab all the leaves there and bring them back," Violetpaw interrupted, desperately trying to come up with a solution.

"And what if one of the plants is poisonous?"

"Why would any of the stuff here be poisonous?"

"Why wouldn't it?"

Violetpaw lashed her tail, racking her brains for another idea. "Okay, fine. How about-"

"How about we give you five seconds to explain what you're doing here on our territory," a new, low voice interrupted Violetpaw, causing both ThunderClan apprentices to freeze with fear, "before we turn you into crowfood."

Instinctively, Violetpaw faced the strange forest, and took a step backward, closer to Ravenpaw. The black tom did the same, until the two were pressed back-to-back, unsheathing their claws nervously as they looked around, trying to pinpoint where the voice was coming from.

"That's five." The cat spoke again, and following it, came the sound of dry branches rustling against each other.

Gasping, Violetpaw glanced up, looking just in time to see three cats leap down at them from the branches above.

Of course. How could she have forgotten SkyClan's defining feature?

"Ravenpaw, look out!" With a mighty shove, she threw herself backwards into the black tom with all her might, just managing to knock him out of the way as a deep red tom landed on top of her.

Violetpaw yowled with pain as the tom's claws sank into her fur, drawing blood. She kicked out desperately, but her hind legs'

mighty blows landed uselessly in the air. From the corner of her eye, she spotted a pale gray-and-white she-cat fighting Ravenpaw. Her fellow ThunderClan cat swiped a paw at the red tom attacking her, but he was too far away and preoccupied for it to do any good; the end of his claws snagged the SkyClan tom's fur before he was pulled away by his own opponent.

The last cat was a white she-cat with pale blue eyes, the only one whom Violetpaw recognized. It was Snowbird, SkyClan's deputy. She watched the scene of her two trained warriors ruthlessly digging into the ThunderClan apprentices, flicking her tail.

"Remember, no mercy," she hissed. "This is what they did to Ashbird. This is our revenge."

Suddenly, an idea flew into Violetpaw's mind. "Stop, stop!" Her voice came out weaker than she'd expected, her strength drained under her attacker's claws. "Wait!"

Snowbird dismissed her. "Ignore her, Redsky," she mewed to the deep red tom. "We'll throw her at the border and leave her to bleed to death. We warned them."

"No, wait!" Violetpaw meowed desperately, twisting beneath Redsky. "We came to talk to Crowstar!"

"Oh, really?" Snowbird's eyes narrowed as she crept towards Violetpaw. Behind her, the gray-and-white she-cat had pinned Ravenpaw down, the black tom's pelt splattered with blood. "What's so important that you snuck past the border?"

Clearly, she didn't care. The taunting tone of her voice told Violetpaw that much. But she still had to try, even if it was fake.

Violetpaw opened her jaws, but nothing came out except a cracked choke. Redsky's paws started to press on her neck now, cutting off her oxygen supply.

"Stop it!" Ravenpaw's voice rang throughout the clearing in a hiss. "You're going to kill her!"

"No, we won't," Snowbird mewed, her voice coming out in a

dangerous whisper. "We'll leave both of you by the border, just like we did to your medicine cat, hm? Now"- she turned back to Violetpaw, her ears twitching -"answer my question."

Violetpaw gasped desperately for air. "L-Lilystar didn't want you to know-" She broke off, her head spinning. It was suddenly becoming very hard to stay awake, her vision slowly beginning to darken. "We know- I know-"

"What?" Snowbird blinked in mock sympathy. "What do you know?"

Violetpaw took one last, shallow breath. "Who the Ghost Assassin is."

That was the last thing she remembered before everything blacked out, passing out along with it.

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wow!! she made a (stupid) choice to sneak into skyclan's territory then got caught?? who didn't see that one coming??

sorry it's uncreative, but i needed plot!

have a great day! make sure to drink water!

~ lily
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chapter 18

floating

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WHEN VIOLETPAW WOKE UP AGAIN, she was in an unfamiliar den. Her head was groggy, her paws were freezing cold, and there was some weird, sticky poultice all over her fur. As soon as she parted her jaws, just for a yawn to try and wake herself up, she instantly became alert, for the scent of SkyClan flooded her tongue.

She jumped to her paws, instantly wincing as her head quickly started pounding at this sudden action.

She was in a dark den. She was in a dark den in SkyClan's camp.

Immediately after coming to this realization, her brain snapped to Ravenpaw. What had they done with him? Had they killed him? Spirits, this was all her fault. Why did he follow her?

She opened her jaws despite the thudding feeling in her head, desperation clutching at her. "*Rave-*"

Before Violetpaw could finish calling out his name, however, a thick fluffy tail wrapped around her mouth, effectively shutting her up. Before she could even react, someone jumped on her, pushing her to the ground and pinning her there.

Her mind instantly went into panic mode, and she started clawing wildly, until she heard a familiar voice hiss, "Ow, Violetpaw, stop, it's me."

An unmeasurable wave of relief washed over the white she-cat. He was alive, and this cat attacking her wasn't some random, vicious SkyClan warrior. But right on the heels of her relief was the anger that he'd knocked her over, so her twisting didn't lessen at all.

Rather, she gave him a few more good kicks until he finally
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muttered, "Alright, alright, point taken. But you have to stay down and stay quiet," before releasing her and climbing off.

Violetpaw glared daggers at Ravenpaw as the black tom backed away, to a good enough distance that she can fully see him. His pelt was crusted with dry blood, the tip of his ear torn. It seemed that SkyClan hadn't bothered to patch up his wounds like they did with Violetpaw, though he still looked to be in better shape than the white she-cat.

"They were trying to wake you up." Ravenpaw's voice was nothing more than a low whisper, answering Violetpaw's unasked question as to why SkyClan had bothered to heal her. "I told them that I didn't know who the Ghost Assassin was, only you did. That you'd done this investigation without Lilystar's knowing. So as long as they think you're still unconscious, we have time."

Violetpaw hissed in pain as she shifted, her head pounding. "So why haven't they killed you?"

Ravenpaw shrugged. "They figured that if they killed me, you wouldn't cooperate and tell them the Ghost Assassin's identity."

The white she-cat suddenly felt her breath hitch. He'd almost died because of her. What if SkyClan had decided that whether or not they kept him alive didn't matter at all? Ravenpaw would be in StarClan right now.

Why did he follow her? He wasn't supposed to follow her. Violetpaw groaned, shoving her head into her paws. She'd been scared at first, but now, after seeing everyone suffer, she was more than willing to risk her own life for Blossomsky's. But not Ravenpaw's.

The black tom crouched down beside her and flicked her ear with his tail. He seemed to be trying to cheer her up, or at least lighten this awful situation that they were in. "I tried telling them that maybe, if it was any other Clanmate with you, you'd be upset. However, it was me, and you wouldn't care. But they just didn't seem to go for it."

Violetpaw glanced up at him with a meek smile, batting at him weakly with a paw. "Oh, shut up. You're not funny."

He let it hit him, purposefully dodging too late. "See, you're trying to kill me right now. Should've just let SkyClan finish me."

She blinked. How could he be trying to make her laugh right now? Doesn't he understand that he almost actually died.

And very suddenly, her mood was sour again.

"Stop joking about these things," Violetpaw grumbled, folding her ears to the back of her head. "You could really actually die."

"And you couldn't?"

"As of right now, I think I've got less of a chance than you," Violetpaw retorted.

Ravenpaw raised an eyebrow. "Wait until they find out you don't know who the Ghost Assassin is."

"But I'm willing to risk my own life," the white she-cat hissed. "I didn't come searching for catmint without knowing about what they did to Featherpool. I knew that they could kill me, but it's worth a try."

"Yeah, and I knew that they could kill me too when I followed you," Ravenpaw replied with a shrug. "Hey, if a fight breaks out, you seriously think that you can take on all these SkyClan warriors by yourself? You'll need someone to hold them off while you run the catmint to Blossomsky."

Violetpaw didn't like that idea. "Or maybe *you* can bring the catmint home while *I* hold them off."

The black tom rolled his eyes. "Stop being such a mousebrain. I'm older than you, I've got more training than you."

"Yeah, but as we learned from the hunting expedition, your aim needs work. And frankly, aim seems pretty important during a fight. Imagine you try and hit a SkyClan cat but you hit a nearby tree

instead."

"I'm not kidding, I'm serious," Ravenpaw meowed. "Just think about it. More cats will miss you if you die than if I die."

Violetpaw scoffed. "That's *ridiculous*. I think your parents would disagree."

"Yeah, but you've got your parents too. And your sister, Eaglepaw, Brightpaw-"

"You've got Brightpaw too," Violetpaw interrupted a little vehemently, trying not to let herself show too much of a reaction to Eaglepaw's name. "And plus, your mentor will miss you. Sunbounce hates me."

"He won't after you bring back the catmint to save his mother," Ravenpaw challenged.

"Stop that. Everyone in ThunderClan will miss you," Violetpaw huffed. "For StarClan's sake, even *I'll* miss you." She wasn't sure why, but she felt her pelt heat up a little at those words, especially given the way Ravenpaw cocks his head in surprise as the response. "Now will you shut up? We're both getting out of here."

"Really?" the black tom drawls. "And you have a plan for that?"

"I will. I just need time to think, and-"

As she was speaking, the sound of dry bushes rustling rang in the background. Violetpaw didn't pay them much attention, but Ravenpaw's ears stood up, alert, and he quickly shoved the white she-cat's head downwards, interrupting her sentence.

"Play dead," he whispered. It was the only warning she got before a shadow suddenly loomed from the den's narrow entrance, and Violetpaw quickly shut her eyes before the SkyClan warrior fully entered.

"Is she awake, Ferndust?" This call sounded further, as though it came from outside the den. It was a voice that Violetpaw recognized; Snowbird, SkyClan's deputy.

Ferndust? Violetpaw felt her heart jump as she suddenly remembered the SkyClan warrior whom she'd met on her first day of being an apprentice. Ferndust, a heavy believer in the Ghost Assassin, and Ashbird's best friend.

There was a pause as Ferndust scanned Violetpaw's form. The white she-cat tried to hold still as much as she could. Then, she heard brown tabby's voice snap at Ravenpaw, "Is she awake?"

"Does she look it?" Ravenpaw answered, sharply and quickly.

"I heard voices talking in here."

"Okay."

"Okay?" Ferndust mewed, her voice tipping into wildly annoyed.

"Well, what else do you want me to say? That I was talking to myself or that you were hearing voices in your head?"

A low growl came from Ferndust. Then, "I'd lose that attitude if I were you. You're in no position to be talking like this."

Violetpaw heard the sound of paws crunching on frosty ground as the SkyClan warrior left, then Ferndust's low murmur to Snowbird, reporting that the white she-cat was still unconscious. Still, she didn't move until Ravenpaw tapped her, letting her know that the den was clear.

The white she-cat lifted her head, then gazed around the dark prisoner den they were in. They looked to be inside a hollow tree, with a narrow entrance that only allowed one cat past at a time.

Slowly, slowly, as she looked around, Violetpaw's line of sight finally turned to Ravenpaw. As she met the black tom's questioning yellow eyes, she allowed her face to split into a smile.

"I have a plan."

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i totally forgot to announce this, but i wrote a little salt in the
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wound teaser in my book of stuff! it's about violetpaw, and whether she ends up with ravenpaw or eaglepaw. it's kind of a spoiler, but it's there if anyone's interested!

thank you for reading as always, and have an amazing day/night!

~ lily

chapter 19

the plan

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"YOU'RE NOT SERIOUS." Ravenpaw's face was etched with disbelief, as though he were expecting her to say *'I'm kidding'* any moment now. "*That's* your plan?"

Violetpaw met his eyes firmly, lifting her muzzle. "I came here for catmint, and I'm not leaving without it. There must be catmint in the medicine den, so-"

"So your great idea is to pretend to be so injured that they move you to the medicine den for care?" Ravenpaw hissed. "I'm sorry, correct me if I'm wrong, but being in the medicine den will put you under Yellowleaf's constant surveillance, won't it? And since you're actually conscious now-"

"I'll stay really, really still," Violetpaw mewed, lashing her tail. "I'll be fine!"

"And what about food, hm?" Ravenpaw gestured to the bird bones piled in the corner of their den. "They'll toss us a small wren every day, but if you're in the medicine den and supposedly unconscious, they won't feed you."

This was a concern Violetpaw hadn't thought about, and she twitched her tail-tip anxiously. "Fine, we'll go moonhigh of the day they bring me over."

Still, Ravenpaw didn't look happy with the plan. "Violetpaw, if they find out you've been faking, not to mention that you don't actually know who the Ghost Assassin is, they'll *kill* you."

The white she-cat ignored him. "Once it's moonhigh, wait until the guards are distracted, then climb up this tree that we're in."
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Ravenpaw scoffed. "They're *SkyClan* cats. One could assume that being up in trees is their specialty. It's like running into the lake if you're being chased by RiverClan."

"No, the trees will be the last place they check *because* it's their specialty," Violetpaw meowed. "They won't think to look there, because they would think you're not mousebrained enough to put yourself in a position where you're so easily caught."

"Whereas in reality..." Ravenpaw grumbled.

"Plus, maybe you can hide in the branches somewhere," the white apprentice suggested. "Your pelt's black, and it *will* be night. It'll be easier for you."

Ravenpaw considered this plan with a look of great disapproval on his face. Finally, he spoke. "Okay, then what about you?"

"I..." Violetpaw trailed off. "I'll figure it out."

"Oh, sure." The black tom rolled his eyes. "*That* sounds promising."

Violetpaw ignored him. "Once you get out of here, run. Run to camp, get help. I'll be right behind you."

Ravenpaw twitched his tail-tip. "You want me to leave you here with a Clan full of vengeful, hostile warriors? What happens if something goes wrong? You're much more injured than I am, there's no way you'll be able to get away."

"Well, once they notice you're missing, then I'll have a chance to sneak out," Violetpaw replied defensively. "It'll be fine!"

Ravenpaw narrowed his eyes. "Great StarClan, Violetpaw, you're so *stupid* sometimes. That is possibly the *worst* plan I've *ever* heard-"

He cut himself off suddenly, ears twitching, and Violetpaw quickly ducked down. She still wasn't as good as Ravenpaw at recognizing the signs of a SkyClan warrior approaching, but Ravenpaw's actions made it obvious enough.

"Here." This cat was Sorrelpaw, her voice echoing through the

hollow tree trunk as she tossed a piece of prey in.

It was a wren again, Violetpaw could tell by the smell. She was beginning to grow sick of its scent; even after it had been consumed, its bones remained poorly buried at the corner of the den, and so the smell of wren seemed to be here always. That scent, combined with the overwhelming stress that she and Ravenpaw could die, was starting to make her nauseous.

"Thanks," Ravenpaw replied.

Now came the standard question every SkyClan cat asked when they delivered prey.

"Is she awake?"

Violetpaw lay there unmoving on the ground, her heart pounding anxiously. *Say it!* she urged the black tom silently in her mind. *Tell Sorrelpaw I need to be moved into the medicine den. Say it!*

She could tell Ravenpaw was debating back and forth by the way he paused. Finally, he spoke. "No."

"Really?" Sorrelpaw's voice came with an air of challenge. "Why the hesitation?"

"No hesitation," Ravenpaw answered smoothly. "It's only that one of your warriors checked in on us only a few minutes ago, and Violetpaw was unconscious then. I just don't understand how you're mousebrained enough to think that would've changed."

A low growl came from the den's entrance. "Watch it," Sorrelpaw snapped. "Violetpaw should be awake by now, shouldn't she?"

Say it! Violetpaw thought, growing desperate now. *Ravenpaw, come on.*

Still, the black tom didn't abide to her wishes. "It's only been a few days, Sorrelpaw. Redsky almost choked and clawed her to death, for StarClan's sake."

"Fine," Sorrelpaw grumbled, "whatever."

As soon as she left, Violetpaw's eyes snapped open, and her pale green gaze instantly turned to glare sharply at Ravenpaw, who had padded over to the den's entrance to retrieve the wren. "Why didn't you go through with the plan?"

"Go through with the plan?" He scoffed, dropping the bird at the white she-cat's paws. "There is no plan! You don't even have all the details yet."

"I do," she hissed. "We could be halfway to escape right now if you'd just told Sorrelpaw to move me to the medicine den-"

"Stop," Ravenpaw grumbled, rolling his eyes. "You'd be halfway to *death* right now if I had followed your plan. Now shut up and here"- he nosed the wren closer to Violetpaw, who fought the urge to gag at its smell -"eat."

The white she-cat made a face and pushed it away. "No, thanks."

"Why? Are you doing this because you're mad? Because you're not punishing me. I'm perfectly happy to have the whole wren to myself, you know."

"No, it's just-" Violetpaw broke off, wrinkling her nose. "That scent's going to make me throw up. It just screams SkyClan. I can't stand it."

As she said those words, the white she-cat felt her pelt heating with embarrassment as she looked away from Ravenpaw, and instead faced the wall firmly. They were in a life or death situation, and here she was complaining about prey preference like a kit!

Still, Ravenpaw didn't scold her. All he did was fall silent for a moment. "Oh."

A pause, then Violetpaw heard the sound of the bird tearing behind her. Then, something thudded next to her. Slowly, she turned around to see that Ravenpaw had tossed her the wren's middle, keeping the wings for himself.

"Here, I know it still smells the same, but it's less of a bird now." He shrugged, his stare pinned on his paws. He seemed to be having

trouble meeting her eyes. "Less SkyClan."

Slowly but surely, a grateful smile started spreading onto Violetpaw's face. Who knew Ravenpaw could actually be nice?

She turned away instantly so that Ravenpaw couldn't see her smile, but there was no need; the black tom was still staring downwards, waiting for her reply. So she gave it to him, quietly and once she made sure that there was no show of her previous grin. "Thank you."

It was only then that Ravenpaw finally looked up and gave her a small nod. Though his neutral expression didn't change, his eyes seemed to sparkle just a little bit more.

Violetpaw leaned down to take a bite of the wren, trying to take shallow breaths. She didn't realize until she was about halfway done that Ravenpaw had given her the bigger and better piece.

chapter 20

confession

~~~

IT SUCKED THAT VIOLETPAW HAD TO witness the year's first snowfall through the opening of SkyClan's prisoner den.

It was past moonhigh when it happened. The white she-cat couldn't sleep, her stomach churning with anxiety about escaping. Ravenpaw, on the other hand, had drifted off hours ago, and his soft snores were filling the den.

It was comforting, in a way, listening to them. It brought back the familiarity of home.

Violetpaw was staring out into the freezing night, listening as even their guard outside, Treefrost, fell asleep, and contemplating the chances of them making it out right now when she spotted the first white flurry falling from the sky. Then, more and more, quicker and quicker, until the Treefrost was awoken by the freezing flakes.

Violetpaw listened as the SkyClan warrior hissed and complained to himself about the cold, and how he should be sleeping in his warm nest right now.

She grinned to herself. Snow had always been her favorite, since it meant that her unusually pale white fur could finally blend in somewhere, but she's never loved it more than in that moment.

She sighed happily to herself, and that quiet noise was all that was needed to wake Ravenpaw up. He may have been snoring, but clearly he wasn't sleeping very deeply. It was impossible to imagine how one could let themselves completely drift off in this environment.

"Hmm?" His voice was deep and groggy. "Everything alright?"
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"Yeah," Violetpaw murmured, gazing outside again at the falling flakes. "It's snowing."

The sight of them seemed to bring some serene calmness to Violetpaw. It was messing with her mind, for when she heard Ravenpaw moving to crouch beside her so that he could see the snow as well, a small smile danced onto her face.

"I don't see what your obsession is with snow," the black tom grumbled. "It's cold, and there's no prey, and-"

"It's pretty," Violetpaw interrupted simply. "It turns the forest into a new world. And there is prey, you just have to be patient enough to look for it."

Surprisingly, talking about home and prey and hunting wasn't dampening the mood as she thought it would. Ravenpaw was the last cat Violetpaw would choose to be stuck with, but he was from home. That, and talking about ThunderClan, was some comfort.

"Yeah, but if it's greenleaf, you don't have to be patient," Ravenpaw pointed out.

"Hunting during leafbare is a true test of skill." Violetpaw sniffed. "Last week, Eaglepaw caught two whole mice! They both scrambled out of a bush, and he slapped them down with one paw each. His timing, coordination, and strength is insane."

She suddenly realized that she'd just rambled about Eaglepaw to a cat that wasn't even her friend. The white she-cat's pelt heated with embarrassment, and she glanced over at Ravenpaw, her mouth opening to try and explain that it wasn't in that way. However, Ravenpaw was already looking back at her with an odd look in his eyes.

"So," he puffed out a breath, "you like Eaglepaw, huh?"

It was awkward, and Violetpaw had never even voiced this aloud to Sweetpaw and Brightpaw. But really, what was the point? Might as well let someone know before she died, even if it was Ravenpaw. "Yeah."

The black tom nodded, slowly, and a miniscule, teasing smile twitched on and off his face. "Okay," he mewed at last. Then, "I think he knows."

"*What?*" Violetpaw meowed, her stomach sinking in horror. "No he doesn't!"

"*Everyone* knows, Violetpaw," Ravenpaw replied, rolling his eyes. "You aren't exactly discreet about it."

"Sure I am!" the white she-cat protested, flicking her ears indignantly. "It's a secret."

"Yeah, a *Clan* secret," Ravenpaw quipped back. "Though, I'm sure if you and Eaglepaw had attended a Gathering together, that secret would get out. But maybe it can be a secret within all five Clans then, and only rogues, loners, and kittypets don't know. However, if-"

"Okay, okay, I get it," Violetpaw interrupted, frowning. "Why are you being mean? It's not as if the entire Clan doesn't know what's going on between you and Brightpaw."

Ravenpaw made a weird face. It was somewhere between wildly confused and a smile. "What? What are you talking about?"

"You and Brightpaw," Violetpaw repeated. "You two are growing very close."

The black tom raised an eyebrow. "I didn't realize you've been watching me this closely."

"I think I'd notice it when my friend doesn't sit with me anymore during mealtimes," Violetpaw retorted. "I haven't been watching *you*, I've been watching Brightpaw."

"Huh." Ravenpaw took in this information with a tilt of his head.

Violetpaw waited for him to say more, but he didn't. Finally, impatient, she flicked her tail at his ears. "Well?"

"Well what?"

The white she-cat huffed. He was doing this on purpose. "Well, do you like Brightpaw?"

"Do I like Brightpaw?" Ravenpaw repeated the words to himself, slowly. "You know, I think that's an answer I'll keep to myself."

"*What?*" Violetpaw protested. "That's not fair, I told you about Eaglepaw."

"Hey, it wasn't a trade kind of thing," Ravenpaw mewed simply. "Plus, I really didn't need you to admit it, I'd already figured it out by myself."

"*Come on*," Violetpaw implored. When the black tom remained quiet still, she bumped him with her shoulder. "Why won't you tell me?"

"Why would I tell you?" Ravenpaw challenged, without missing a beat. His yellow eyes beamed deeply into her green ones. "We're not friends."

Those words made Violetpaw frown. Sure, she knew that, and in no way did she want to be his friend, but she was really hoping he'd ignore that fact in favor of the conversation. Seeing her face fall downward, though, Ravenpaw rolled his eyes.

"Fine, here. I like someone, but I won't tell you who it is."

Violetpaw's eyes lit up. "It's Brightpaw, isn't it? She's the only cat I ever see you talking to."

"Yeah, she's my friend. I could like Brightpaw. But I could like Sweetpaw. It could be a far away admirer thing, like you are with Eaglepaw, except I don't act like I've got fluff for brain when I'm around her."

"Oh, shut up," Violetpaw grumbled, slapping the black tom with her tail.

But Ravenpaw was relentless. "Dapplepaw, maybe. Or, it could be Eaglepaw. I could be your competition. He's got, er, nicely shaped ears."

"Nicely shaped ears?" Despite her initial annoyance, a smile cracked onto the white she-cat's face. "*That's* the nicest thing you can think to say about him?"

"Well I certainly don't fawn over him like you do," Ravenpaw mewed.

Violetpaw just scoffed with a grin, glancing away. "Come on, you're being ridiculous."

The two fall quiet for a short, comfortable moment until Ravenpaw speaks again. "I bet he enjoys it, you know."

"Hmm?" The white she-cat looked back over to her Clanmate.

"Eaglepaw," Ravenpaw clarified. "If it makes you feel any better, I bet he enjoys it. Attention from a pretty she-cat must do wonders for his ego. And hey, you know, you two are just like your parents."

Violetpaw blinked. "You've heard that story?"

"Sure, the elders love telling it. About how Swanfrost was wildly in love with Frostsky but he never noticed until they became warriors - you know, I'd bet that'll become a nursery tale in the future. You and Eaglepaw can be the sequel story."

Violetpaw scoffed. "Okay, well, Dad loves Mom now, maybe even more than she liked him. He always tells her that she's the best thing that's ever happened to him."

Ravenpaw flicked his tail, never breaking their eye contact. "And you think you'll get that with Eaglepaw?"

Violetpaw shrugged, suddenly becoming a little uncomfortable with the conversation. She felt vulnerable talking about this, admitting that it could be more than a little crush. So, she swiveled her head to look at the snow. "It worked out for Mom."

The black tom nodded, slowly. "Okay."

Silence blanketed them again, until Ravenpaw broke it with a quiet voice.

"Fine," he sighed. For a moment, Violetpaw was wondering what he was talking about, until he continued begrudgingly. "I'll do the plan."

The white she-cat's head snapped to him, her eyes lighting up. "Really?"

"Yes. *But*," he mewed, sharply as he watched Violetpaw nearly jump to her paws in excitement, "I'm going to come back as a ghost and tell you *'I told you so'* if I die."

Violetpaw just grinned at him cheerfully. "You have a pretty good chance of dying either way," she chirped, watching as Ravenpaw rolled his eyes.

And that night, with the snow and the somehow light atmosphere in SkyClan's prisoner den, things were starting to look up.

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when they're taken prisoner by an enemy clan, could be brutally killed, and decide to gossip about their crushes
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chapter 21

hero

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YELLOWLEAF WAS A STERN, yellow tom with grumpy green eyes. White fur was flecked around his muzzle, revealing his old age and years of wisdom. His voice, though, was sharper than any Violetpaw's ever heard.

When Ravenpaw saw SkyClan's medicine cat, along with two other warriors, coming to transport Violetpaw to the medicine den, he flicked his tail a little in panic.

"Violetpaw, Yellowleaf doesn't look like he messes around. He'll see right through you," he hissed quietly. "He-"

"Shut up," Violetpaw whispered back, despite her increasing heartbeat from anxiety. "They're coming. I'll see you after moonhigh."

The black tom's eyes narrowed, but he held his tongue. Thankfully, too, because that was the moment Yellowleaf swept in, Treefrost and Oakbounce on his tail.

They didn't say anything to Ravenpaw. It was quick. Treefrost helped maneuver Violetpaw onto Oakbounce's back, and the dark gray tom ducked out, carrying the ThunderClan apprentice over to the medicine den.

Oakbounce must want me to wake up soon so that he'll finally be able to avenge his mother's death, Violetpaw found herself thinking suddenly. *Too bad the Ghost Assassin is just a nursery tale.*

But that struck the question, who *did* kill Ashbird? Even if the cats of ThunderClan claim that Ashbird slipped, Violetdust was murdered too, wasn't she? In a similar fashion to the SkyClan she-
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cat.

Violetpaw's stomach churned uncomfortably at the thought. Maybe the Ghost Assassin *was* real.

"Over there." Yellowleaf's stern voice broke through the silence, and before long, Violetpaw felt herself drop onto a bed of moss. The foliage felt nice after nights of laying on the cold, hard ground. "Wet a moss ball and bring it over."

A low grumble came from Treefrost. "This is ridiculous."

Yellowleaf's ears didn't seem to miss a single thing. "What was that?"

Even Violetpaw knew that challenging the SkyClan medicine cat wasn't a good idea, but Treefrost spoke up again anyway.

"This entire thing is ridiculous. Housing these ThunderClan apprentices, feeding them - for StarClan's sake, we don't even know if this one"- he gave Violetpaw a harsh poke -"actually knows who the Ghost Assassin is!"

"But it's worth a try." Oakbounce's voice sounded quietly, a little further away. "If we finally avenge Mom's death, then Crowstar could finally be at peace."

"Yeah." Treefrost snorted. "He has gone a little crazy since his daughter died, hasn't he? Well, I guess you wouldn't have been old enough to remember. Ashbird would've just given birth to you then."

Violetpaw thought Treefrost's words were wildly insensitive, but Oakbounce didn't say anything.

Finally, it was Yellowleaf who shot the black tom down. "That's no way to talk about your leader. This is what Crowstar wants to do, and you have to respect it. Now get me that moss ball and get out."

More grumblings came from Treefrost, but the tom obediently followed the medicine cat's directions before he and Oakbounce shuffled out of the den. Then, Violetpaw felt Yellowleaf near her,

his presence drawing closer and closer, until she could feel his green eyes staring into her soul.

Stay as still as possible, Violetpaw told herself, not daring to even breathe. *Stay still, stay still...*

However, the longer this went on, the more she felt herself slip into despair. Ravenpaw was right. Yellowleaf would see right through her. He'd get Crowstar now. This plan wasn't going to work.

Desperation started to seize her, and Violetpaw felt panic growing in her mind. What should she do if Yellowleaf called for Crowstar? Try to make a run for it? But what about Ravenpaw? They agreed on moonhigh, and-

The medicine cat's voice suddenly broke through her worried haze. "Featherpool is my friend."

Huh? Confusion struck Violetpaw, and it slowly started to billow over her anxiety.

"Featherpool is my friend," Yellowleaf repeated, quieter now, "and what these warriors did to her isn't right. She had *every right* to come search for catmint."

Violetpaw was past confused now. Did Yellowleaf know she was faking? Was he talking to himself? Or was he talking to her?

Just in case, she made sure to keep still.

There was a pause. Then, the sound of Yellowleaf's pawsteps filled the den, growing quieter as he moved away. When he returned, he carried with him a delicious smelling scent, wafting into Violetpaw's nose. A small thud came as the yellow tom dropped the bundle he'd brought in front of the ThunderClan apprentice's nest.

"I know what you're really here for." The medicine cat voice was low. "Moonhigh's your best shot. Everyone will be asleep then." There was a break. Then, "I know I'll be."

Violetpaw remained motionless, refusing to twitch so much as an ear. She felt Yellowleaf stand there for a few heartbeats more, eyes

boring into her pelt, before he turned and padded away. It was only once the white she-cat felt certain that he was gone that she cracked open one careful eye.

To her surprise, sitting in front of her, was a bundle of tall, leafy plants with hairy stems. Her heart skipped a beat.

Catmint.

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THE REST OF THE DAY proved uneventful, only slowly gathering increasing anxiety and excitement as moonhigh neared. Yellowleaf dressed some more of Violetpaw's wounds, as per his job, but the pale she-cat couldn't help but feel he was putting more effort and care into it than he needed.

By the time moonhigh arrived, Yellowleaf was sound asleep in his nest. He was curled up into a ball and snoring quietly when Violetpaw slowly sat up, blinking to adjust her eyes to the darkness. She glanced down at the bundle of catmint in front of her, then at SkyClan's medicine cat.

"Thank you," she murmured, though she knew he wouldn't hear her.

Leaning down, she carefully picked up the herbs, and crept near the den's entrance.

Snow had settled thickly onto SkyClan's camp, topping everything in a layer of white flakes. However, from the day's activities, countless paw prints had been indented into it, so Violetpaw needn't worry about leaving tracks.

What she did need to worry about was Ravenpaw. Tonight's guard wasn't Treefrost, who could be counted on to fall asleep, but rather Oakbounce. The dark gray tom sat in front of the den, and despite staring blankly into the distance, lost in his own thoughts, his green eyes sliced sharply through the night.

A small frown tugged its way onto Violetpaw's face. Oakbounce's eyes looked so familiar.
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Behind Oakbounce, though, she spotted a shift in the shadows. Ravenpaw. The black tom's gaze cut across camp to the medicine den, his amber eyes meeting Violetpaw's pale green ones. A feeling of relief washed over both of them; good, everything so far was going as planned.

The only thing was that this was as far as Violetpaw's plan had gone for herself. Ravenpaw was supposed to climb up the tree - and he's halfway up now, carefully making his way upwards with Oakbounce's back facing towards him - but Violetpaw had no clue how *she* was supposed to get out.

She looked at Oakbounce, who was staring directly at the camp's entrance. Spirits, what should she do?

The white she-cat glanced over at Ravenpaw again. He'd safely made it to the first branch, and was looking to check where she'd gotten. When he saw that she was still in the medicine den, stuck, his gaze moved from Violetpaw to Oakbounce, pelt twitching with understanding. His eyes suddenly narrowed, focused.

It became instantly clear to Violetpaw what he was about to do.

"No," she whispered, shaking her head, trying to get Ravenpaw's attention and tell him to stop. But the black tom wasn't looking at her anymore; his eyes were pinned onto Oakbounce.

Then, with a mighty leap, Ravenpaw launched off the branch, claws unsheathed, landing squarely on top of the SkyClan warrior.

chapter 22

midnight swim

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IT SEEMED TO HAPPEN IN slow motion for Violetpaw. She watched as Ravenpaw's claws sank into Oakbounce's pelt, and the dark gray tom's startled yowl as he twisted around to see what was going on.

She watched Oakbounce's eyes widen and lunge at the black tom. Ravenpaw narrowly pulled his tail from between the SkyClan warrior's mighty jaws, and Oakbounce's teeth clamped down on air. Then, when Ravenpaw saw that Violetpaw was still standing at the medicine den opening, frozen with shock, he lashed his tail and yowled, "*Go!*"

It was only at the sound of Ravenpaw's voice that Violetpaw sprinted for the camp's opening. She stopped short of exiting the camp completely, glancing over her shoulder and mewing a muffled, "Ravenpaw!"

However, the black tom was already on his way. Despite still being an apprentice, he was already a large cat, and his legs were longer than Oakbounce's. He bounded for the entrance, and though the SkyClan warrior leaped after him, Ravenpaw managed to get away with only a scratch on his flank.

"C'mon, c'mon," he hissed, wrapping his tail around Violetpaw and yanking her forward.

"Crowstar!" Oakbounce's voice boomed through the camp. "Crowstar, wake up!"

Adrenaline burst through Violetpaw as her heart started beating louder and louder, blood rushing throughout her body. She was free. Free. She and Ravenpaw would be okay.
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As the two raced blindly through the forest, slipping and sliding on the ice and narrowly dodging the brambles, Violetpaw's mind suddenly jumped to Ashbird. Could one of these frosty patches have taken down Crowstar's daughter? Or was it something - or someone - else?

Just then, the branches above them rustled. Violetpaw's head snapped upwards to see who it was, and to her horror, she met the pale, furious blue eyes of Snowbird. The SkyClan deputy was a little ways behind them, but was quickly catching up with her mighty leaps as she darted from tree to tree.

As the white she-cat twisted her head further back, she found that behind Snowbird was an entire patrol. Ferndust, Treefrost, Oakbounce - even Sorrelpaw, her green eyes flashing with determination as the group closed onto the two ThunderClan apprentices.

Violetpaw whipped her head forward again, narrowly missing a tree as Ravenpaw pulled her out of the way just in time. Despair began taking hold of her as hope started to diminish; ThunderClan's territory was still out of sight, and who knew if she and Ravenpaw were even running the right way?

The SkyClan cats behind them were getting closer and closer, as they hopped from tree to tree to...

"Tree!" Violetpaw mewed, an idea suddenly flashing in her mind. "We need to get out of the trees!"

However, it seemed the catmint must've muffled her mew, for Ravenpaw squinted at her. "The bees?"

"Trees!"

"Free?" he meowed, glancing at their chasers. "I don't think we're going to be free for that long. You'd better come up with someone to accuse as the Ghost Assassin."

The white she-cat simply rolled her eyes in response. She could hear the sound of the lake waves lapping the shore to her right and

started steering her and Ravenpaw in that direction. He looked properly confused, but (thankfully) complied all the same.

A low hiss came from Snowbird as she came to a sharp stop before veering to her right. Still, this detour didn't slow her and her patrol down by much.

But it gave Violetpaw and Ravenpaw the time that they needed. The two apprentices burst out of the forest to the lakeshore, and the white she-cat kept running until they were right next to the lake. The icy water lapped onto their paws, and Violetpaw flinched from the feeling, but she didn't move away; she's never been so thankful for the distance between herself and the forest.

Being at the shore helped orient her, too. She spotted the Gathering Island sitting in the middle of the lake, the stars twinkling coldly from above. And there was ThunderClan's border - she wondered if she and Ravenpaw could make a run for it.

Most likely not. Who's to say these SkyClan cats won't follow them across the border?

That's where Violetdust died, Violetpaw recalled suddenly. Wouldn't it be ironic if she died there also? Spirits, her parents would be heartbroken.

The SkyClan cats halted at the last branch, leaping down easily from the trees. Despite not having the advantage of being able to pounce down on them anymore, they still had the numbers, the *warriors* compared to apprentices. So, as Snowbird stalked forward, she moved as though she were hunting prey, her patrol fanning out from behind her.

"Running away, were we?" she hissed lowly. "This only proves that ThunderClan cats are *liars*."

Violetpaw didn't bother to dignify that with a response - not that she could talk even if she wanted, anyways. Instead, for every step that Snowbird took forward, she went backwards.

Well, at least she tried. When she attempted retreating, something

strong pulled her back. Startled, she realized that Ravenpaw's tail was still wrapped firmly around her from when they'd first run out of SkyClan's camp. It had been there this entire time. And it felt calming. Grounding.

"Ravenpaw," Violetpaw hissed as best she could. "Come on."

"Into the lake?" Ravenpaw shook his head, keeping one careful eye on the SkyClan cats who were getting closer and closer. "You're crazy."

The white she-cat flicked her ears. For some reason, the thought of going into the lake didn't make her shudder as it would other cats - and that put an idea in her mind. "Exactly. They won't follow us."

Ravenpaw's nose wrinkled, and he took an unconscious step backwards at how close Snowbird was getting. "What? Let's just run. I see the border-"

"They'll catch us, and you know it," Violetpaw whispered lowly. "They won't follow us into the lake." Seeing Ravenpaw's hesitation, she added, "Come on, just trust me."

This time, when she went back, Ravenpaw didn't stop her. Snowbird's eyes changed clearly with confusion, but it wasn't the deputy who figured out their plan first. Rather, it was Sorrelpaw, and when the ginger she-cat realized what was going on, she darted forward, quick as the flash.

Before Violetpaw could even process what was happening - the icy water was starting to numb her body and brain - Sorrelpaw's eyes were beaming into hers. Green met green, before Violetpaw knew it, she suddenly felt a sharp pain in her cheek as the SkyClan apprentice's claws sliced her.

Ravenpaw reacted quickly, knocking Sorrelpaw away with one mighty blow. Sorrelpaw landed in the water, and she yelped, immediately shooting upwards and darting back onto the beach.

The black tom turned to Violetpaw. "Did she get your eye?"

Violetpaw blinked, testing both eyes out, before shaking her head.

Her cheek was starting to throb, but the rest of her body hurt dreadfully, too; what was one more thing?

Snowbird stopped short of the lake, staring at them. "What in StarClan's name are you *doing*?" she demanded, lashing her tail. "A little bit of water won't save you! Treefrost, go get them."

Treefrost hesitated. "It's leafbare-"

"Don't tell me you're *scared*," Snowbird hissed.

"They must be cold!" Treefrost protested. "Let *them* freeze! We'll just wait them out, they can't stay in there forever."

"Wimp," Ferndust muttered, rolling her eyes and stepping forward. "*I'll* do it, Snowbird." She faced the water, locking eyes with Violetpaw. "I'll find out who killed Ashbird."

She darted forward into the water, instantly leaping at the two apprentices with outstretched claws.

"Back, back," Violetpaw mewed hurriedly, shoving Ravenpaw deeper into the lake.

It was getting to the parts where her paws couldn't touch the ground anymore, but that wasn't what she was anxious about. The water kept her afloat, and she just had to kick and cling onto Ravenpaw; at least *he* could still touch the ground.

Plus, she was more worried about the brown tabby she-cat in front of her, trying to avenge her friend.

Ferndust landed short of the two, and immediately sank from the force of her jump. Clearly, the water was too deep for her. She resurfaced with a panicked gasp, and clawed blindly around her. However, Violetpaw had already urged Ravenpaw further in, so nothing hit the two ThunderClan apprentices other than a few splashes of water.

The brown tabby turned and immediately started paddling ungracefully to shore. When she reached it, she was shivering uncontrollably.

Still, Snowbird seemed undeterred, and turned to Oakbounce. "You're taller, you can stand. *You* go in."

At this, Violetpaw tried pushing Ravenpaw back more, but the black tom wouldn't budge. "I can barely touch the ground now," he snapped.

"It'll be fine, just float in the water," the white she-cat returned.

He gave her a dangerous glare. "*Violetpaw...*"

"Listen, really, it'll be okay." It was difficult to talk around the catmint, but this was life or death. "The elders told me a story like this once. An ancient ThunderClan medicine cat once had a patient float in the water to help heal her leg. They were both okay. And we will be, too. Trust me."

The cold water hurt, but the claws of the SkyClan warriors would hurt no less.

By the time Oakbounce made his way into the water (he was much more careful after seeing Ferndust's leap) the two apprentices had already retreated farther in. They were floating, but Violetpaw wasn't really sure how much longer they could keep it up. After all, this would only delay their deaths, not prevent it.

She'd really hoped she would've come up with another plan by now.

But, just as Oakbounce grew near them, a yowl came from down the beach. Everyone's heads snapped towards the sound, and Violetpaw let out a gasp of joy.

Never had she been more relieved to see her dad's pelt. Frostsky was there in the lead, Icedust, Leopardbounce, and Stormbird pelting after him. She was sure she was grinning like a maniac, but it didn't matter. She even felt herself nudge Ravenpaw happily.

They were saved.

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this chapter literally makes like zero sense do not ask me about the
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logistics at all i have no clue. my only thought before writing this was 'oh, violetpaw and ravenpaw probably couldn't win in a fight' and we've somehow ended with this.

anyways!! i'm curious, who do you guys think the ghost assassin is? there hasn't been a huge move on that investigation, but now that violetpaw's coming around to believe it's real, i'm excited to begin that part of the story!

thank you always for reading!! i hope you have an amazing day!

~ lily

chapter 23

home

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WARMTH ENVELOPED VIOLETPAW when she woke up. After being numbingly cold in that lake, and sleeping on the frozen, hard ground of SkyClan's prisoner den, sleeping on a comfy moss bed felt like a dream.

It took her a second to get her bearings. She was in the apprentices den, and - from what she could see from the opening - it was sunhigh. She could hear the voices of her Clanmates from outside, too far away for her to make out any distinctive words.

Last night had been a complete blur. After she saw Frostsky, who'd heard noises and gathered a patrol to investigate, it was like her mind completely tapped out. She was safe. She didn't have to worry or think anymore.

Her dad was here.

What she could remember were bits and pieces. Snowbird put up a fight for a little while, but it really was no use. Oakbounce and Ferndust couldn't stop shivering, and the ThunderClan cats were fighting with such ferocity to protect their apprentices that the chances of SkyClan winning were low.

Violetpaw and Ravenpaw had already waded to the shallow areas once SkyClan had retreated, but still, Frostsky threw himself into the lake, desperation and relief glinting through his eyes.

"I thought you were *dead*," he'd choked in Violetpaw's ears, pressing his pelt against hers to try and warm her up as Icedust hurried to check over his apprentice. "Don't ever do that again."

The white she-cat just sighed tiredly, pressing herself deeper into
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her father. "I got catmint," she mumbled.

Then, she'd handed the herbs off to Leopardbounce. The last thing she remembered were the warriors setting her and Ravenpaw down in their nests, and Sweetpaw's worried face staring into hers.

Now, as she blinked around blearily at the den, she realized that she was all alone in there. Of course, it made sense that the other apprentices had to get up and train as usual, but she expected that Ravenpaw would be in here with her.

After spending the past few days constantly in the black tom's presence, it felt odd not seeing him as soon as she woke up.

Violetpaw yawned and stretched out her legs, feeling her sore muscles groan. Her fur was clean of the mud it'd accumulated - someone must've washed her - and was instead covered in a fresh coat of poultice. There was some on her cheek, too, where Sorrelpaw had scratched her.

After sitting there for a little while more, the white she-cat finally pushed herself to her paws. Her head spun and her vision blurred for a quick moment, before she blinked quickly to clear it out. Slowly - and albeit, a little shakily - she exited the den.

The chilly leafbare air caught her immediately, and with the sun up in the sky, its light reflecting off the fallen snow, it was *bright*. Violetpaw squinted against it, and as soon as her eyes adjusted, her mother was in front of her.

"Oh, Violetpaw." Swanfrost's voice was full of relief as she practically leapt onto her daughter, covering her in licks. "I'm so glad you're awake. Nightspirit said you would be okay, but you were trembling like crazy last night, and there was blood and dirt and grime all over your fur, and-"

"I'm okay, Mom," Violetpaw interrupted softly, pressing herself into her mother's warm pelt. It was like she was a kit again, safe and cozy. She never wanted to leave. "I'm sorry. I just-" She broke off, unsure of how to explain herself. "Well, how's Blossomsky?"

"Better," Swanfrost answered, her voice muffled by Violetpaw's fur. "The catmint's effects are obvious. Nightspirit said that this morning that she was looking much better. *But*"- she pulled away to give her daughter a very stern look -"that does not mean I encourage you to do anything like this ever again."

The white she-cat sighed. "I know. I just... couldn't let Blossomsky die."

Swanfrost stared at her for a few moments, before her scolding expression gentled. "You remind me of Violetdust every day," she mewed quietly at last. "She would've been very grateful."

Violetpaw gave her mother a meek smile. The name Violetdust drummed in her head again, only this time, it sounded louder. Like whatever had been hidden away in the back of her mind was becoming stronger, making its way to the front. She didn't quite understand that.

"So," she meowed, changing the subject instead, "where's Sweetpaw? And, er, everyone else?"

It looked like she was the only apprentice in camp right now.

"They're all out training. Lilystar and Russetfrost were planning an attack on SkyClan after your and Ravenpaw's disappearance. We were just worried that if we made any sudden moves, SkyClan would kill you two." Swanfrost's voice cracked, and she had to take a pause before continuing. "Anyways, the attack called for heavier combat focused training than normal."

Violetpaw frowned. "Even Ravenpaw's out training?"

The pale gray she-cat nodded. "Yes. I think-" She broke off, shifting on her paws. "I think he just wants things to go back to normal. Pretend like it never happened."

"Oh. Okay, right." Violetpaw flicked her tail. "Then should I...?"

"No, no." Swanfrost shook her head immediately. "Your body's not ready for training yet. And I don't think Sunbounce is in the mental state, either. You both still need a couple of days." She touched her

tail-tip to Violetpaw's shoulder. "Though, if you're up for it, Sunbounce is down by the Sky Oak. It might be nice to talk to him."

The white she-cat thought about that, then nodded. "Yeah, okay."

"Want me to walk you?" her mother offered.

Violetpaw shook her head. "No, that's alright. I want some time to think."

"Okay," Swanfrost murmured softly. "If you ever need anything - to talk, or anything - just come find me, okay? I'll always be here for you."

Violetpaw gave her a small smile. "Okay."

As she turned to pad to the camp's entrance, it suddenly occurred to her that several of her Clanmates were staring. Of course, they were all engaged in activities of their own, but they all seemed to be glancing at her from the corner of their eyes.

She couldn't take the attention anymore. Violetpaw broke into a quick trot that turned into a sprint as she bounded out of camp.

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sorry, filler chapter! but a transition was needed i think! hopefully the next chapter will be more interesting!!
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chapter 24

history

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IT WASN'T HARD TO FIND Sunbounce's flaming ginger pelt in a world of snow. Indeed, he was sitting below the Sky Oak as Swanfrost had said, staring out at the lake with a blank expression.

Violetpaw approached him cautiously. She was unsure of how he'd react to her. However, as she neared, her paws accidentally shifted on a dry piece of stick, which broke easily below her weight. Sunbounce's ears flew upwards and his head snapped over to look at who was there, but he relaxed at the sight of his apprentice.

"Violetpaw."

"Hi, Sunbounce," the white she-cat mewed a little nervously, hopping over. The closer she grew, though, the more she felt her tail-tip twitch at Sunbounce's appearance. The ginger tom looked *dead*. "Are, er- are you okay?"

Sunbounce sighed deeply, gazing at the lake again. "Shouldn't I be asking you that question?" When he received silence as an answer, however, he shrugged. "I'm just tired. I don't think I've slept a wink of good sleep since Mom got diagnosed with greencough, and ever since you were taken by SkyClan - well, sleep just wasn't an option."

Violetpaw shifted her weight on her paws. She'd always thought Sunbounce hated her, and in some odd way, it was nice to hear that he cared about her disappearance.

Her mentor turned to her. "Why did you do that, by the way? You risked your life for Blossomsky's. Why?"

Violetpaw didn't think she'd be able to explain it, because she to be
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truthful, she didn't know. There was just this bond she felt deep in her stomach, something she couldn't shake, paired with the name of Violetdust.

But she wasn't sure how to put that into words - and for it to not sound like she'd lost her mind - so instead, she just flicked her tail. "I couldn't let Blossomsky die to greencough," she mewed, as though it were really that simple.

Sunbounce shook his head. "Blossomsky's an old cat, Violetpaw. She's about to retire to the elders den. She's lived her life. You haven't, and her life wasn't worth risking yours."

This surprised Violetpaw. Sunbounce had been the one who could barely get out of his nest once hearing about Blossomsky's sickness. This would be the last thing she would've thought the ginger tom would say, so all she could do was stare at the ginger tom in disbelief.

Her mentor didn't seem to notice, however. It looked as though this tender moment was gone, and an overwhelming wave of relief combined with exhaustion had swept over him, for he chuckled, as though he were a bit out of his mind. "It would've been ironic, though."

Violetpaw twitched her ears, and she couldn't help but laugh a little bit - out of confusion - too. "What would?"

"If Blossomsky died from greencough." Sunbounce's peals came to a slow stop. "My sister, Honeykit, died from greencough too. My parents had never gotten over that, and it would've just been... *interesting* if my mom died the same way as her favorite kit did."

He was clearly lost in his thoughts, and Violetpaw even wondered for a split second if he was talking to himself. There were many things to unpack from those words, but the last bit stood out to her, as if she related to that thought somehow.

And there was that drum again, chanting the same name: *Violetdust*.

"Don't say that," Violetpaw mewed, looking down at her paws. "I'm

sure Blossomsky loved all of you equally."

Sunbounce scoffed, shaking his head. "Everything Violetdust and I did, it would have to trace back to Honeykit. When we became apprentices and warriors, Mom practically cried her eyes out because Honeykit could never have this opportunity. When I became mates with Whitebird, instead of being happy, Mom and Dad were all upset, because Honeykit would never be able to have that experience."

The white she-cat shifted on her paws, unsure of what to say to that. "Sunbounce..."

"I bet Violetdust had someone she liked. You know, in fact, I bet it was *Stormbird*." Sunbounce shook his head with a smile, as though the thought was hilarious to him. "I figured it out. That would make sense, wouldn't it? Why she never told anyone. Why they were both out that night."

Violetpaw wasn't sure he wanted her to reply, so she kept quiet, and only nodded, which her mentor took for a response.

"Mom and Dad talk about Honeykit all the time," the ginger tom murmured quietly. "All the time. About how she was taken too young, about how she never deserved this. And about her eyes - she had heterochromia eyes, did you know? The color of her eyes developed while she was quarantined in the medicine den, so nobody else really knows but us."

For some reason, Violetpaw could envision this, like an old memory. *One is amber and one is blue.*

"One amber, one blue," Sunbounce mewed, confirming Violetpaw's thought. "Oh, Mom and Dad love talking about it. About what a shame it is that nobody ever got to see her beautiful eyes."

He sighed, shifting on his paws. "But they never bring up Violetdust. Never her eyes, her skills, her achievements - absolutely nothing."

Violetpaw thought about this carefully before answering. "Maybe it hurts more to talk about Violetdust, so that's why they never bring

her up," she suggested slowly. "They could be trying to avoid the pain."

Sunbounce shrugged, and looked out at the beach again. "Maybe."

The two fell silent for a brief moment, before the ginger tom spoke again.

"I still remember the night Violetdust died." His voice was shaky, but he didn't stop. "Her, me, Whitebird, and your parents were all sharing prey together. We were making jokes and teasing each other about relationships, and Violetdust all of a sudden decided to talk a walk by herself. I always thought it was because she might've felt left out."

For some reason, Violetpaw felt a spark of curiosity. She'd heard about Violetdust, Ashbird, and the Ghost Assassin for ages now, but the context surrounding their deaths had never been talked about, as though speaking of it were banned. "And then?"

"Well, Whitebird and I got tired after awhile, so we went into our den. We were just talking, and the next thing I knew, Stormbird was yowling that Violetdust had been killed," Sunbounce meowed, his voice cracking. "If I had just stopped her from going on that walk, or maybe suggested that I accompany her-"

"Stop," Violetpaw interrupted quietly. "Don't think like that. Nobody could've guessed that this would happen."

"I guess," Sunbounce muttered. "Though I just don't know why anyone would want to harm Violetdust. And if it was the Ghost Assassin - who I've always believed to be a character in a nursery tale - why would be kill Ashbird, then years later, kill Violetdust?"

"Do they have any sort of connection?" Violetpaw wondered aloud.

"Not that I know of," the ginger tom replied. "Other than the fact that they're around the same age. I suppose we all might've talked as apprentices at the Gathering, but that was all in a group setting, and Violetdust and Ashbird would've hardly interacted one-on-one, if at all."

Violetpaw shrugged. "Maybe it's just completely separate, then. Maybe they both knew something that the Ghost Assassin didn't want getting out."

"Like what?" Sunbounce scoffed, his words clearly meant to be a joke. "A prophecy?"

However, when Violetpaw spoke, her tone was completely serious. "Yes."

She wasn't quite sure how, but she could see that scene play out clearly in front of her - like an old memory. The connection with StarClan broke the night Violetdust died; StarClan would've been desperate to find someone to pass a prophecy onto. Violetdust, out of camp and on the beach, nearest to the Gathering Island, would've been easiest to reach.

Once the prophecy had been passed on, the Ghost Assassin killed Violetdust. Simple as that.

But one thing struck her as odd. How did the Ghost Assassin know that Violetdust would be receiving a prophecy that night? Did he have some help? From a spirit?

That thought was unsettling to Violetpaw, so she shivered and fell quiet, staring at the icy lake lapping the shores beside her mentor.

chapter 25

reunion

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BY THE TIME Violetpaw and Sunbounce returned to camp, it looked to be that most of the patrols had come back as well. The clearing was bustling with cats now, and though the white she-cat felt many eyes sticking to her pelt, nobody approached her to bombard her with questions.

It seemed that Swanfrost had gotten around to everyone and told them to give Violetpaw space, which she was more than grateful for. Of course, though, Sweetpaw was an exception.

The gray tabby apprentice jumped on Violetpaw as soon as she stepped into the camp, pressing her muzzle into her sister's pelt. The feeling of returning to Sweetpaw's side was no less than euphoric, and Violetpaw felt her mood lift tremendously after that deep conversation with Sunbounce.

"I'm okay, I'm okay," she kept repeating into Sweetpaw's ears; still, there was a slight tremble to her sister's body, as though Sweetpaw couldn't quite believe that Violetpaw was home.

From the corner of her eye, Violetpaw caught sight of Ravenpaw, sitting at the edge of the clearing with a thrush at his paws

Once the two finally broke apart, they padded over to the fresh-kill pile. Sunbounce had already passed by, and was now carrying a mouse over to the medicine den. Featherpool was sitting outside, laying some herbs out in the sun around her, despite the fact that her leg was still bent in an awkward position. Inside the den, by the entrance, lay Blossomsky - Violetpaw could just make out her dappled pelt, and the silhouette of her head lifting to greet Sunbounce.
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Even the day seemed to feel a little warmer, tipping out of the harshest parts of leafbare. Everyone was healing.

Sweetpaw followed Violetpaw's gaze to Blossomsky. "Ravenpaw's giving you all the credit for that, you know."

Distracted, the white she-cat didn't fully grasp her sister's words. "Hmm?"

"To anyone that's asked him, he's said that you're the one that got the catmint and deserves the praise," Sweetpaw mewed, digging through the prey pile for a shrew.

Violetpaw twitched her ears, protesting a little at how wrong that was. "Yeah, but if it wasn't for Ravenpaw, I probably would've died in SkyClan's camp."

Sweetpaw's eyes flashed at the mention of Violetpaw's death, before she pushed it away with a shake of her head. "I never thought I'd see the day where you two are being nice to each other."

"Yeah, and you still won't see it," the white she-cat replied dryly.

"Some things never change," Sweetpaw hummed, grabbing her shrew before retreating over to the side.

Violetpaw grabbed her prey as well and padded a little bit after her sister. As her eyes tracked and predicted where Sweetpaw was walking to, she realized, with a start, that Ravenpaw and Brightpaw were eating together.

She wasn't sure why this struck her as so unusual. Ravenpaw and Brightpaw had been spending their meals together for weeks, but the sight of them together now - especially after that discussion in SkyClan's camp with Ravenpaw - left an odd twinge in Violetpaw's stomach.

She blamed it on the fact that she and Ravenpaw had spent days together in only each other's company, relying on only each other's presences.

As the littermates passed by, Brightpaw glanced up from the

squirrel she and Ravenpaw were splitting. The calico she-cat raised her tail in a friendly greeting, and Violetpaw returned the gesture. When she glanced over at Ravenpaw, however, she found that his eyes were pinned to the squirrel in front of him.

A small flame of annoyance sparked in Violetpaw's stomach. She knew that Swanfrost had said that the black tom wanted to move past this experience, but how could he shake it all off so quickly? Ignore her the way he had before?

They may not be friends, but that kind of experience was difficult to shake. At least, it was for Violetpaw. Apparently Ravenpaw's already well past it.

She didn't know why she was mad at him, but she was.

Huffing, Violetpaw faced forward once more and trotted over to Sweetpaw, who had crouched down below a tree. She watched Violetpaw approach, her sharp green eyes softened with worry. "You okay?"

"I'm great," Violetpaw replied, trying and failing to keep the frustration out of her voice as she sat down as well, flicking her tail.

Thankfully, the gray tabby didn't ask what was wrong. Violetpaw probably couldn't put it into the proper words, anyways. Instead, Sweetpaw touched her tail-tip gently to her sister's shoulder. "Eaglepaw was really worried about you, you know."

She remembered how Ravenpaw had said the entire Clan knew of her crush, and was careful to guard her reaction. Still, the name made Violetpaw freeze up, and she turned her face away from Sweetpaw so that the gray tabby couldn't see her expression. "I think it's normal to be worried when your Clanmate's been taken by an enemy Clan," she replied, attempting to keep her tone flat and bored.

"Mmm, sure," Sweetpaw mewed with a shrug. "Or, there could be something more."

Violetpaw scowled. "No, there's not."

Her sister only smiled at her knowingly. "He's cleaning out the elders den right now. Maybe you could talk to him once he's done."

The white she-cat only sniffed, offering no reply. However, as she ate, she kept a careful eye on the elders den the entire time. And indeed, after a while, Eaglepaw padded out.

It had only been a few days since she'd seen him, but Violetpaw swore that he got stronger. At least, he *looked* stronger. He looked nice.

Instantly, Violetpaw wanted to slap herself. She'd faced bloodthirsty SkyClan warriors, and now, at the sight of Eaglepaw, she was becoming a mousebrained apprentice.

Before she knew what she was doing, she had pushed herself to her paws. Sweetpaw cast her an amused look, and embarrassment quickly followed when Violetpaw realized she'd just stood up out of nowhere. As she was about to sit back down, mouth opening and closing as she scrambled for an explanation, Eaglepaw caught her eye from across the camp.

Great. Eaglepaw saw her make a complete fool of herself.

To her surprise, though, the brown tom's face split into a friendly smile and he started padding over.

Violetpaw froze completely at this, and she took a deep breath to try and calm herself. It didn't work, however, for she was still completely jittery when Eaglepaw stopped in front of her.

"Hey, Violetpaw," Eaglepaw mewed gently. Then, when Sweetpaw cleared her throat with an air of humor, he turned to her and hastily added, "Hi, Sweetpaw."

"Eaglepaw," Violetpaw breathed. Her fur felt way too warm, her ears flicking nervously, her tail swishing awkwardly in the air, unsure of how to position herself. "Hello. You look- nice."

He snorted. "You spent days in SkyClan's camp and you're talking about *me*? How are you?"

"I'm good. Fine. Great." The white she-cat twitched her pelt. "I, er, met Yellowleaf. I spent some time in SkyClan's medicine den. A brief stint. A day. Yup. They, uh, organize their herbs differently there." Great StarClan, she wanted to slap herself. What was she *saying*?

Yet, she couldn't stop.

"I mean, all the herbs are the same, just... where they're put. That's different. I mean, of course I could never know for sure, I don't organize the herbs in ThunderClan's camp, and-"

Thankfully, Sweetpaw tapped her sharply with her tail, putting an end to Violetpaw's ramble.

Eaglepaw seemed very confused by the conversation, but humored her all the same. "Oh. That's nice." He gave her a small smile as they lapsed into silence. "Well, I'm glad you're back now. And safe. And, er, you look nice too."

These words sent a complete flatline through Violetpaw's mind, her brain struggling to wrap themselves around the sentence and properly comprehend it.

Eaglepaw didn't give her much time with that, anyway, for he quickly turned around and mewed, "Well, I should get back to the elders. Enjoy your mouse."

That, though, her brain managed to work through, and while it continued to struggle with the previous sentence, Violetpaw meowed in reply, "I will. I'll enjoy it. A lot."

But by then, the brown tom had already padded away, and Violetpaw's last few words fell to nobody's ears but Sweetpaw's, who snickered.

"So," the gray tabby started, "nothing there, you know?"

"Be quiet," Violetpaw grumbled, sinking to the ground, mortified, burying her muzzle in her sister's pelt as Sweetpaw laughed.

Unbeknownst to her, however, a certain black tom had been

watching the entire exchange with careful yellow eyes.

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sorry this update came so late!! this chapter was so hard to write for me, i think because it leaned more to the filler chapter side and i was trying to work out the rest of the plot (because i had lowkey forgotten it haha).

how's life going for everyone? school's started for me, and i've been *busy*! but i had missed all my friends so so much so honestly i don't mind!

have an amazing day/night!

~ lily
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chapter 26

nightmares

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PAWS HIT THE GROUND carefully, weaving through the brambles of SkyClan's territory and the patches of ice that have formed during leafbare. The cold gusts of wind were frequent, but the hot, boiling anger rolling in her stomach kept her warm.

How dare he?

The thought had been dancing through her mind for the past weeks, and by now, it was nothing less than a resident in her brain, reappearing every few minutes.

How dare he do this to me?

He'd been avoiding her. That much was obvious. The fact that he thought she wouldn't pick up on it was insulting.

Sure, they couldn't live together. She hadn't expected as much when they fooled around as apprentices, but she'd always thought him to be a noble tom. To abandon their kit and not even *attempt* to live up to his fatherly duties - the very thought sent another wave of rage throughout her as she thought of her son's face.

I don't want him to grow up wondering why he doesn't have both parents, or believing that his father abandoned him, she thought, flicking her tail-tip angrily. *I don't want cats to whisper and gossip about who his dad is. This gets settled tonight.*

When she approached the border, it didn't take long for her to realize she'd arrived first. Other than her, the area was deserted.

He better not be bowing out, she thought, scowling. *If he's standing me up after finally agreeing to meet, I will go find him and drag him outhere by the ear.*
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However, that wasn't needed; a few moments later, the sound of a bush rustling came from her left. Her ears pricked, alert. The scent wasn't familiar. It was minty, and for a moment, she tensed, about to disappear into her territory, before she spotted a flash of his fur in the moonlight. It was only there for a second before his body vanished into the dark again, but it was him.

"I'm sorry I'm late." His voice came out in a low rumble and she had to resist the urge to roll her eyes. His face is hidden within the shadows, scent covered with mint, and was now doing a fake voice, all in case of an eyewitness. Needless to say, he really didn't want anyone to track this meeting back to him.

But she couldn't care less. "Quite frankly, I'm surprised you showed up at all. You've been avoiding me."

He hesitated, but didn't deny it. "Ashbird-"

"No, I'm not here to listen to your mousebrained excuses," Ashbird interrupted vehemently. "I'm going to talk, and *you're* going to listen."

When she received no reply, she could practically imagine him flicking his ears in the dark as an indication for her to continue.

"Oakkit needs his father."

His answer this time was quick. "I'm not going to join SkyClan."

"Like anyone in SkyClan would want you to, anyway," Ashbird spat, twitching her pelt in annoyance. "All I'm asking from you is to meet Oakkit by the border every now and then, and talk to him. And talk to him at the Gatherings."

A crunch in the snow indicated him shifting on his paws uncomfortably. "Ashbird, I wouldn't mind that, but it would be hard to accomplish without anyone finding out I'm his father."

The dark gray she-cat scoffed. "Well that wouldn't be a problem, because we're not going to hide the fact that you're his father."

She could imagine his recoil. "*What?*"

"Both our Clans deserve the truth," Ashbird mewed simply. "Your son deserves the truth, and he deserves to be able to interact with his father without trying to hide it."

"Ashbird, we *can't* let this get out," he hissed worriedly. "My Clan-"

"ThunderClan will simply have to deal with it," she answered sharply. "You-"

"*Violetpaw*."

The scene in front of Violetpaw flickered away as a new, airy voice interrupted the dream. The white she-cat was suddenly surrounded by mist with nothing around her for as far as she could see, almost like she was suspended in the sky.

When she looked around, confused, a dark gray pelt flashed into her vision. Violetpaw took a step back instinctively, but it didn't take her long to realize that this dark gray she-cat looked familiar, despite the fact that Violetpaw had never seen her before. She looked just like the white she-cat had imagined her from the countless stories and descriptions she's heard.

Ashbird.

As Ashbird neared Violetpaw, the white she-cat tensed, and had to remind herself that it was all just a dream to force herself not to flee. The last encounters she's had with SkyClan were not friendly, but Ashbird approached tentatively, her amber eyes flickering with restrained hope.

"Violetpaw?" she repeated, though this time in the form of a question.

A puzzled frown drew on Violetpaw's face. The connection between the living world and StarClan should be broken. Was this truly Ashbird's spirit? "How do you know my name?"

She was tense, on guard - maybe Ashbird was a spy for SkyClan somehow (if she could access Violetpaw's dream, why couldn't she do the same with her own Clan?) - but the dark gray she-cat's face split into a smile of pure joy and relief.

"You can see and hear me?"

This wasn't how Violetpaw had expected this to go. "Yes, I-"

"Oh, StarClan, that's *wonderful*," Ashbird mewed, waving her tail happily. "I've been stuck here by myself for years. I couldn't find my way to StarClan, and nobody seemed to be able to see me."

She's been by herself for years? Violetpaw couldn't help but feel a flicker of sympathy. "Is that why there's still so much debate over your death?"

Ashbird's face suddenly turned solemn, and she nodded. "I've been trying to show that memory to anyone I could find, but it's never worked until now. I can't believe-" She cut herself off, shaking her head. "Well, now you know. You must go tell Lilystar, and my dad, and-"

It occurred to Violetpaw very suddenly that Ashbird thought that the white she-cat knew her murderer's identity. The Ghost Assassin's identity. Maybe he showed his face or something like that near the end of the memory, but as of right now, Violetpaw hadn't a single clue who he was.

"Ashbird, wait-"

"Oh, I've been waiting *ages* for this." The dark gray she-cat's eyes gleamed. "Oakbounce will finally know the truth, and this stupid tom will finally get what he deserves, after killing me, killing Violetdust-"

"Killing Violetdust?" Those words rang oddly out of Violetpaw's mouth, and she felt a weird, unexplainable feeling in her stomach.

Ashbird nodded. "The Ghost Assassin must pay for his crimes," she mewed, twitching her tail-tip sharply.

Seeing how elated Ashbird looked - like a crushing weight that'd been on her shoulders for years had finally lifted - Violetpaw almost felt bad when the next words tumbled out of her mouth. "I don't know who the Ghost Assassin is."

Instantly, Ashbird's face fell, and a hint of desperation took over her voice. "But you must. You saw the memory-"

"His identity was hidden," Violetpaw mewed apologetically; however, she couldn't hide the undertone of confusion in her voice.

Why did Ashbird look so panicked? Can't she just tell the white she-cat who her murderer is?

"No," Ashbird mumbled, taking a step back. "No, *no*."

Violetpaw frowned, moving forward for every step that the dark gray she-cat retreated. "But you know who he is. Just tell me."

"I can't. Last time I tried *telling* someone-" Ashbird cut herself off, gulping. "They're going to send me back."

"What?" In Violetpaw's opinion, Ashbird was spouting absolute nonsense. "Who's going to send you back? And send you back where?"

But she didn't reply. Instead, she just continued to shake her head, staring at her paws.

Violetpaw tipped her head. The connection between the living world and StarClan should be breached. As far as she's aware, no spirits can come harm Ashbird. "Just try," she implored.

Ashbird's face was an array of emotions as her eyes danced from her left to right, as though desperately trying to decide what to do. Finally, she took a deep breath. "Okay-"

As soon as she said that word, chaos erupted.

The sky they seemed to be afloat in suddenly parted as a huge chasm opened beneath Ashbird. Violetpaw managed to back onto an edge, and she looked over worriedly towards the dark gray she-cat. Ashbird's eyes widened with panic, and she tried darting over towards Violetpaw, but given that there was nothing beneath her and therefore nothing to push off on, it didn't work.

She managed to take a leap that sent her right to the side of

Violetpaw's edge, and the white she-cat reached out a paw to try and pull her up, but Ashbird was too far down.

"Ashbird!" she yowled, desperately looking around for a solution. "Hang on!"

A growl came from the bottom of the chasm, and when Violetpaw peeked down, she saw only darkness. The Place of No Stars.

"There's nothing you can do for me here," Ashbird grunted as shadows darted out from the chasm. "Find him, Violetpaw."

The shadows grabbed onto her legs and started to tug her down, but both cats were helpless.

Ashbird's voice got more panicked, more rapid. "He's not going to stop until she's satisfied. He can't. Avenge me. Avenge-"

As the shadows gave one last pull, overcoming her strength and bringing Ashbird down into the chasm, the dark gray she-cat yowled something that Violetpaw will never forget.

"Avenge us, Violetdust!"

chapter 27

dawn

~~~

VIOLETPAW WOKE UP PANTING. It took her a second to regain her senses. As her mind ran wildly with thoughts from her dream, she had to force herself to focus on something present and grounding.

Surprisingly, she found that to be Ravenpaw's snoring. Even though it'd been a moon since their time in SkyClan, it seemed the comfort he'd given her while they were in the paws of their enemies still held.

Whatever the reason was, listening to the sound of the black tom asleep helped to slowly calm her breathing, and Violetpaw flicked her ears, looking around.

Early morning light was creeping into the den, shining on two empty nests. Eaglefrost and Dapplelight had become warriors last week, and Ravenpaw's Warriors Assessment was set for the next moon. They were all growing up.

Violetpaw sighed, turning her attention to outside the den. She could hear the low, tired murmurs of the warriors assigned to the dawn patrol, and it was with a start that she realized she and Sunbounce were meant to be on it.

Quickly, she pushed herself to her paws and trotted out.

It was brighter than usual, and felt much warmer. Violetpaw loved the snow, but after that scary dream, she couldn't help but be happy for the light and warmth.

"Violetpaw. Good, you're up." Sunbounce greeted her with a flick of his tail.
~~~

Her mentor looked much better than he had in moons, too. It seemed he'd finally been able to get some sleep, and his blue eyes finally recovered that spark of life they'd been void of.

It was with a sudden chill that Violetpaw remembered what Ashbird told her, and that Violetdust had also been murdered by the Ghost Assassin. Should she tell Sunbounce?

Funnily enough, Ashbird called Violetpaw *Violetdust* at the end. Was that a mistake on the SkyClan she-cat's part?

"Fogsky and I were just about to come get you guys," Sunbounce mewed, gesturing to Brightpaw's mentor standing a little behind him.

Fogsky nodded. "Can you go wake her, please?"

Violetpaw flicked her tail and turned around, but couldn't help dragging her paws a little as she ducked into the apprentices den. Her relationship with Brightpaw had turned... *weird*. The calico had been one of her best friends, but now, she seemed to always prefer Ravenpaw's company over hers, and was prone to giving Violetpaw an odd, cold look.

The white she-cat hadn't had time to ask Brightpaw about it. For StarClan's sake, she hasn't even spent one-on-one time with Brightpaw since they were kits. This patrol certainly was going to be interesting.

Once everyone was awake and up, they set off. As usual, the warriors split off into their own groups, chatting amongst themselves as the apprentices fell together. An awkward silence enveloped Violetpaw and Brightpaw, and the white she-cat stared ahead, unsure of what to say.

It wasn't like they *needed* to talk, anyways. Now would be a good time to fully interpret her dream.

Violetpaw took a deep breath and thought back to Ashbird's memory, running through all the events. As she recalled Ashbird's argument with the Ghost Assassin, she found herself caught on one

line:

"Oakkit needs his father."

Oakkit? As in Oakbounce? That would make sense. Oakbounce *is* Ashbird's son. But that means... That means his father is the Ghost Assassin.

Violetpaw flicked her tail nervously. Did Oakbounce know? Does he know his father killed his mother? Does he know his father's identity at all?

She had to find out.

Another part of that dream stuck with her. Ashbird referred to the Ghost Assassin's home as *ThunderClan*.

Violetpaw shivered. So Crowstar wasn't crazy; the Ghost Assassin was indeed a ThunderClan cat. But how was that possible?

She thought of her Clanmates. Which one of them was a *murderer*? Which one of them would father a kit with a SkyClan cat, then *kill* her? Violetpaw couldn't even begin to *think* of a motive that would drive a cat to do that, much less have it somehow connect with one of her Clanmates.

Was this cat still in ThunderClan? A cat sleeping in the same den as her parents? That was a fact that the white she-cat was having trouble wrapping her mind around.

And, as the Violetpaw remembered Ashbird's panicked face as the chasm pulled her into the Place of No Stars, the dark gray she-cat had mentioned another cat.

"He's not going to stop until she's satisfied."

This left Violetpaw with chills running beneath her skin. All along, she'd thought, if the Ghost Assassin were real, he was just one cat. She didn't realize that there were two enemies to deal with, an upper power that the Ghost Assassin answered to.

And finally, of course, the Violetdust situation. Ashbird had called

Violetpaw by the name of Violetdust as she was swallowed up. Was that a slip of her tongue, brought by panic? Or was that something else?

It was odd. Violetpaw was indeed named after Violetdust, but being called the late she-cat's name left a feeling in the apprentice's stomach that could be described as nothing less than weird.

But it didn't feel misplaced. No, rather, it felt... right.

"A cat from the past seeks revenge."

Violetpaw practically jumped in shock, and her head snapped over to her right. Those words had interrupted her train of thought, hissed into her ear. Or, at least she *thought* they were hissed into her ear. It felt so real, but there was nobody to her right except Foxbounce and Ivydust, and they were much too far away to whisper something like *that*.

Maybe she'd imagined it.

Slowly, she drew her head back to center and looked forward.

"Their fallen future, they want to avenge."

This time, the sound came from her left, and Violetpaw flinched, instantly whirling her face over. However, her gaze found no one except Brightpaw, who was already peering back at her with a perplexed look.

"You alright?"

Violetpaw puffed out a breath, slowly shaking out her pelt. She was losing her mind. "Yeah, sorry."

The calico nodded, but she was wearing a strange expression on her face, as though she had something else she wanted to say. Violetpaw waited, but when Brightpaw remained quiet, she decided to prompt her.

"Something wrong?"

"No. Yes. Well..." Brightpaw trailed off, and her eyes turned to her paws. "Violetpaw, I've been your friend since we were kits. I've never *not* been your friend."

The white she-cat blinked, unsure of where this was going. "I know this."

"And, well, now I'd like you to be very, *very* honest with me." Brightpaw inhaled deeply. "Do you... do you like Ravenpaw?"

chapter 28

the raven

~~~

THAT WAS AN ODD QUESTION. So odd that Violetpaw had to repeat it in her mind then study Brightpaw's face to see if she was being serious. When the white she-cat determined it was indeed a genuine question, she burst into laughter.

Well, she would if that question were posed to her two moons ago. But now, she didn't find the question very funny. In fact, it felt like she was forcing her whiskers to twitch in amusement.

"Do *I* like *Ravenpaw*?" Violetpaw scoffed. "Great StarClan, I've never heard *that* one before."

A look of relief faded into Brightpaw's expression. "So I take it you don't?"

"Take it," the white she-cat replied, flicking her tail easily.

Brightpaw nodded. "Sorry for even asking. I was just wondering because, well, ever since he came back from SkyClan, he's been acting... weird."

"Couldn't it just be from the experience?"

"Maybe," the calico mewed, twitching her pelt, "but it's not really like that. He's always open to talking about SkyClan, but as soon as your name is mentioned, he shuts down."

Violetpaw's face furrows into a frown without her consent, and she twitches her pelt a little indignantly. "Why?"

Brightpaw shrugged. "I don't know, but he never used to be like that, so I was wondering if maybe something happened while you guys were in SkyClan's camp."
~~~

Violetpaw thought about it. What, talking about who they like? Bonding? Taking the first step to becoming friends? All that caused Ravenpaw to hate her so much that he pulls away when her name comes up?

A scowl pulled onto Violetpaw's expression at the very thought. "No. Nothing happened."

Brightpaw nodded again, slowly. "Well, did... Well did he maybe mention me at all?"

"Mention you?"

"You know, while you guys were talking, did the subject ever come up?"

Violetpaw knew exactly what Brightpaw was asking about, and what the calico she-cat wanted to know. She blew out a breath and faced forwards, thinking back to that night. Ravenpaw had refused to tell her who he liked, but he did concede that he was padding after someone. If not Brightpaw, then who?

Finally, she spoke, quietly, "I think he likes you."

Instantly, Brightpaw's face lit up. "Oh, really?"

"Yeah," Violetpaw mewed, shifting on her paws. She tried to make her voice as lighthearted as possible, but for some strange reason, there was a lump in her throat. "I really don't understand why you like him though."

The calico only grinned at her, giving her ear a light flick. "There's just something about him. He acts all tough and cold, but really, he's very sweet. And he's hardworking and funny and..."

Yeah, I know, Violetpaw wanted to say as Brightpaw droned on and on, remembering how surprisingly kind and uplifting Ravenpaw had been during their time in SkyClan's camp. She caught herself, though, and instead smiled.

"Okay. I'm glad for you."

Brightpaw beamed at her, giving her a teasing nudge. "And hey, it's not like I'm the only one. You and Eaglefrost, huh?"

Violetpaw recoiled a little, flushing. "Oh, well, I don't know."

"Well I do!" Brightpaw declared cheerfully. "You two are *so cute* together."

Right. She liked Eaglefrost, not Ravenpaw. So why did Violetpaw suddenly wish that she could switch places with Brightpaw?

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RAVENPAW BECOMES RAVENDUST in the next few weeks. The weather has finally tipped into newleaf, birds were chirping in the air, and worries of SkyClan were slowly fading away. Well, that's not exactly accurate. Border patrols were always careful to watch for an impending attack, but none came. SkyClan had stopped attending Gatherings, but other than that, it was as though everything had returned to normal.

In fact, the only troubled one was Violetpaw. She couldn't stop thinking about the Ghost Assassin. She wasn't sure how to catch him. Maybe she could ask her parents? They were apprentices at the same time as Ashbird. Maybe they knew which ThunderClan tom was taken with her.

But right now, she took a deep breath, zoning back into the Warrior Ceremony.

"Ravendust! Ravendust!" the Clan was yowling.

Quickly, Violetpaw raised her head to call his name as well. It felt weird on her tongue. They weren't kits anymore, squabbling with each other over anything and everything. He was a warrior now, and soon, she would be too.

Cats flooded up to congratulate Ravendust as soon as the ceremony was over, and Violetpaw let Sweetpaw drag her over as well. Brightpaw was already there, staring up at the black tom with admiring eyes.
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"Ravendust!" Sweetpaw mewed chirpily. "Wow, it's crazy that you're a warrior now. Are you excited?"

Violetpaw hadn't spoken to Ravendust in many weeks now, and so it felt weird hearing his voice up close when he spoke. "Somewhat. I'm not that excited for the vigil tonight."

At this, the white she-cat's ears twitched indignantly, almost on instinct.

Of course, Ravendust caught this. "Problem?"

And of course, who was Violetpaw to keep quiet? "Yes. A vigil is a proud thing. To be able to hold it means that you've accomplished the great task of becoming a warrior."

Ravendust raised an eyebrow. "I didn't say I'm not proud. I'm simply not looking forward to sitting still all night." When the white she-cat opened her jaws to retort, he added, "And hey, you should really watch your mouth, Violetpaw. I'm a warrior now. I can order you to fetch prey for me anytime I like."

Violetpaw glared at him. Great. So he hasn't matured *at all*. "Ravendust-"

He tipped his head, his yellow eyes blinking at her expectantly. Suddenly, Violetpaw felt her harsh words faltering in her throat.

"Congratulations," she ended up mewing instead.

The black tom's face furrowed in shock. "Have you hit your head somewhere?"

Violetpaw ignored him, shifting a little on her paws, embarrassed. "I need to go for a walk now. Goodbye."

Promptly, she turned sharply and sped out of ThunderClan's camp as fast as her paws would carry her. Great StarClan, what had taken over her? Ravendust was never going to let her live this one down.

And now, instead of taking the nap she'd planned to take after the ceremony, she was going to have to go on a walk. Great.

She puffed out a breath. She'll just do a quick loop around the territory and go back. Maybe she'll still have time for a nap before the sunset patrol-

"The Ghost Assassin dwells in ThunderClan."

Violetpaw's head snapped up in shock. Those words floated towards her, sing-song, in a she-cat's voice. It didn't sound unfamiliar, but she couldn't place her paws on who it belonged to.

Where was it coming from?

"If you want to avenge your daughter, you need to attack ThunderClan."

This time, the noise seemed to originate clearly from the beach. Violetpaw didn't waste another second, instantly sprinting over towards the water. As she burst out of the trees, however, she found that the beach was deserted. There was no cat there but her.

"I'm doing this for us, Violetdust, don't you understand?"

Violetpaw whipped around wildly. What was going on? How was she hearing this?

"Who are you?" she yowled into the air.

"Don't you agree that life can be so... unfair?"

Violetpaw unsheathed her claws, lashing her tail as she looked back and forth crazily, slowly backing into the water. "Show yourself!"

Was this all just in her head?

"You're dead, I'm dead, and it's all StarClan's *fault."*

And that was the last thing Violetpaw remembered before everything went black.

chapter 29

burning daylight

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IT TOOK VIOLETPAW a few heartbeats to regain her bearings when she woke up. The first thing that popped into her mind was the voice on the beach.

She couldn't place her paw on it, but she had a feeling she'd heard it before. It belonged to a she-cat. Could that be the "she" that Ashbird had referred to?

And this cat, she was addressing Violetdust. Why would she be addressing Violetdust, and why would *Violetpaw* hear it?

The white she-cat groaned. Too many questions, and not enough answers. Instead, she turned her mind towards her body, slowly flexing a paw at a time to make sure everything is physically okay.

She was in the medicine den, a moss ball soaked with water laying besides her. The early dawn light was sneaking into the den through the entrance, beginning to light up the cave. In the corner, she could see Featherpool's silver pelt, curled up in her own nest.

As Violetpaw leaned over to lap gratefully at the water, a shadow was suddenly cast into the den, announcing the arrival of a cat. The apprentice's head jerked over to the entrance, before her eyebrows raised in surprise; Ravendust.

Ravendust froze when he saw her awake, as though he'd been caught doing something he wasn't supposed to. In fact, it was Violetpaw who broke the silence.

"Ravendust," she mewed. "What are you doing here?" She couldn't help but tease, falling into the same banter they've always had. "Surely you're not here to visit me?"
~~~

At this, as though finally regaining his senses, he scoffed. "No. Of course not. You're out of your mind."

"Really." Violetpaw flicked her tail. "Then what *are* you doing here? And so early? You couldn't have gotten hurt so badly between last night and now that you couldn't wait until Featherpool was awake to get checked out, and unless you suddenly decided you'd like to pick up some apprentice jobs again, I can't imagine why you'd be in here for mouse bile."

Ravendust twitched his ears indignantly. "I'm here for water."

The water in the medicine was for sick patients and kits only. Every cat knew that.

Perhaps she was still drowsy from sleep, but for whatever reason, Violetpaw's mouth curled into a coy smile. "I think you're here to visit me."

"No," Ravendust snapped, "of course I'm not. Are you out of your mind?" And as if to prove that point, he stalked across the den to the small drip of water and began to lap.

"Careful, Ravendust," Violetpaw mewed, albeit amused, as she watched him, "visiting someone is only something cats would do if they're friends."

The black tom straightened. "We're not friends."

His voice woke Featherpool. The medicine cat roused, frowning a little in confusion as she took in the scene in front of her. "Ravendust. What are you doing here? And up, so early? I didn't know you were on the dawn patrol this morning."

He cleared his throat. "I'm not. I, er-"

"He's here for water," Violetpaw supplied, ignoring the glare Ravendust shot her way.

Featherpool blinked dryly at Ravendust. "That water is typically for sick patients and kits only. There's a stream right by the camp if you're thirsty."

Ravendust twitched his pelt awkwardly. "Right. Of course. I knew that."

The silver she-cat shook her head, though it was clear she was more amused than annoyed. "Bye, Ravendust."

As the black tom took his leave, Featherpool pushed to her paws, turning her attention to Violetpaw now.

"So, how are you feeling?"

"Oh, fine. Good." Violetpaw stared at her paws, feeling well embarrassed. "Have you ever had a patient who passed out from absolutely nothing before?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that your unconsciousness was caused by absolutely nothing," Featherpool mused. "You know, when Stormbird found you, he said that you were screaming Violetdust's name."

Violetpaw jerked back a little, surprised. "What?"

"As far as I'm aware, connection with StarClan was cut off the night Violetdust died." Featherpool crouched until she was eye-level with the apprentice. "Is there anything you would like to tell me, Violetpaw?"

The white she-cat's mouth felt dry. Should she tell Featherpool what she'd heard? But she didn't even know what it was; what if the medicine cat thought she was crazy?

"No," she answered at last, slowly.

Featherpool sighed. There was a clear tone of disappointment. "Very well. There's nothing physically wrong with you, so you may leave and continue with your training as early as right now if everything feels okay."

"Everything feels okay," Violetpaw mewed.

"Off you go, then," Featherpool replied, gesturing to the medicine den's entrance with her tail.

A little shakily, the white she-cat pushed herself to her paws, and padded outside.

Indeed, the sun was only beginning to rise. The camp seemed to be asleep. The dawn patrol had just left, Sunbounce wouldn't be up for hours, and Violetpaw felt jazzed, wide awake and full of energy. She wanted to visit the beach.

She knew she shouldn't, but there was something that called her to it. She'd been called Violetdust one too many times by the spirits for it to be a coincidence, and she wanted answers. The beach was where Violetdust died. The beach would have the answers.

When she reached the shore, however, she noticed that it wasn't empty like she expected. A black tom was sitting on the sand, watching the water lap over the land, and Violetpaw quickly recognized him as Stormbird. She suddenly remembered that Featherpool told her it was also Stormbird who found her; he seems to visit the beach a lot, then.

Violetpaw didn't know Stormbird well. He was Sweetpaw's mentor, Sunbounce had accused him many times of being Violetdust's murderer, but other than that, the white she-cat knew little of him. Shockingly, though, the sight of a warrior she wasn't close with didn't deter her from her mission. Rather, she padded right on over, as though her paws were leading her.

Stormbird glanced over at the sound of paws crunching against sand, and his face lifted in surprise. "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in the medicine den?"

Violetpaw shrugged in response, stopping a little bit away from him. "I woke up this morning, and Featherpool let me go." She paused, then continued. "She said you were the one who found me."

"Oh, yeah." Stormbird puffed out a breath then turned to look at the lake. "Yeah, I like to come here when I have free time. It, er..." He trails off. "It brings back memories."

Violetpaw thought back to her experiences with this lake, the most prominent of course being her and Ravendust running into the

water to escape the SkyClan cats. She remembered how sure she was that the water wouldn't hurt them, that despite most cats' fear for swimming, that they would be fine.

Suddenly, the memory came back to her, as though something was unlocked.

Her and Stormbird playing in the lake. Well, it wasn't *Violetpaw*. A ginger-and-white she-cat splashing around in the waters with Stormbird. Violetdust.

"You and Violetdust..." Violetpaw spoke slowly. "You two used to come here a lot, didn't you?"

Stormbird's head snapped towards her in shock. "How..." His green eyes were as wide as saucers. "How did you know that?"

Then, more and more memories started flooding back, racing in front of Violetpaw's eyes like a montage.

Becoming an apprentice then warrior with Sunbounce, scanning the crowd for her parents only to see Blossomsky and Russetfrost's dejected eyes.

Helping Swanfrost - Swanpaw at the time - come up with ways to approach Frostsky and then, when he became a warrior, talking with her long hours into the night about the gray tom.

Whispering, "We need to keep this a secret a little while longer," to Stormbird, and seeing the black tom's understanding eyes blinking back at her.

Honeykit's eyes, so full of life when they played around with the moss ball, slowly became clouded with sickness. When Violetkit visited her with her parents and Sunkit just days before her death, Honeykit had blinked her eyes open at them. Her eye color had finally developed to show one amber, one blue.

Telling her friends she wanted to take a walk that night, then padding out of ThunderClan's camp after Stormbird.

The prophecy.

Violetpaw gasped as she took a step backwards, finally returning to the life she was in right now. Stormbird had stood up, and was now staring at her with concerned eyes.

"Are you okay? How did you know about me and Violetdust?"

But Violetpaw couldn't give him her answer. She knew what it was, but she just didn't understand. How could that be?

I'm Violetdust.

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yayyy she finally figured it out!! sorry this chapter might've been boring to you guys because there was nothing introduced that you didn't know already, but it was still important to have i think!

i really don't want her to have like a cinderpelt/cinderheart moment where cinderheart was like "i must be a medicine cat bc that's what cinderpelt was!!" that part wasn't super fun for me to read and i just don't want to write it, so i'm not going to do it haha

also!! please let me know if you guys think she would tell stormbird that she's violetdust or not. i'm pretty conflicted on that, i could go either way. like i feel like she could just blurt it out from shock but at the same time maybe she'll be strategic and keep it to herself? i don't know, let me know what you think!

as always, thank you for reading! and drink so much water i'm sick right now and i'm gulping water haha
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chapter 30

the great battle

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"VIOLETPAW." Stormbird's expression was past concern now. It was a mix of complete disbelief, confusion, and even a little bit of fear. His words came out through his gritted teeth, hissed. "What was all that? How-?"

"I'm Violetdust," Violetpaw interrupted. The words had come out of her mouth before she could stop them, and from the way Stormbird's face fell, she was regretting not holding her tongue.

Would he call her a liar? Delusional?

But there was nothing she'd ever felt more sure about in her entire life.

"You're Violetdust?" Stormbird coughed out a laugh, as though she told a joke - or, likely, he was hoping what she'd just said was a joke. "That's impossible."

"It's not," Violetpaw replied, remembering the stories Swanfrost had told her about ThunderClan's ancestors. There'd been a medicine cat who died and was reincarnated into her brother's kit. "It's happened before."

"But how-? Why-?" Stormbird took a step backwards, shaking his head. "Violetdust died. She's dead. She's in StarClan." His voice was tight with pain. "You're not Violetdust."

The white she-cat thought about this. From their lives, she and Violetdust were two different cats; but, Violetdust's spirit and memories were inside her now.

Violetpaw opened her jaws to try and put those ideas into words so that Stormbird wouldn't think she was crazy, but before she could, a
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yowl came from the woods. Instantly, the two cats' heads whipped towards where the noise came from, and Violetpaw's stomach fell when she realized it was from SkyClan's border.

Then, if possible, her stomach dropped once more when she recognized who the yowl belonged to: Ravendust.

Before she even knew what she was doing, she was in the woods, bounding over to the border as fast as her paws could carry her, Stormbird running right alongside her.

When they got to the border, it was a mess.

SkyClan and ThunderClan cats were there, fighting each other ferociously. Everyone's pelts blended together in a mesh of claws and teeth, and somewhere, behind his cats, stood Crowstar.

Violetpaw hadn't seen SkyClan's leader in many moons, but now that Ashbird's appearance was imprinted in her mind, she realized the similarity between Crowstar and his daughter was striking. Their amber eyes both seemed to gleam when showing emotion, and now Crowstar's, watching the battle intently, was filled with anger.

A father's love for his kit was not to be doubted.

Just then, two cats sprang apart nearby Violetpaw and Stormbird: Sunbounce and Ferndust. The two were glaring at each other with pure hatred, and as they went back at it, Stormbird jumped in to help Sunbounce.

Violetpaw looked back and forth wildly as the battles waged on around her, trying to pinpoint a Clanmate that she could help. But suddenly, she heard a voice through the noises of fight, the same sing-song voice that'd taunted her at the beach.

"The Ghost Assassin dwells in ThunderClan."

This time around, Violetpaw recognized the voice.

"Oh, no," she whispered, her blood running cold. "But how could this be?"

A cat from the past seeks revenge, their fallen future they want to avenge...

Violetpaw shook her head and took a step backwards, muscles tight. What would Sunbounce say? Russetfrost, Blossomsky? She could hardly believe it herself.

But it was inevitable. The voice that had spoken to Crowstar all these moons, encouraging him to hate ThunderClan, the voice that perhaps controlled the Ghost Assassin - it belonged to Honeykit.

The white she-cat wasn't given a single second to process this. Suddenly, a heavy weight dove into her, and Violetpaw was knocked onto her side. As soon as she regained her bearings, Sorrelpaw's eyes were gleaming into hers.

"Hello, *Violetpaw*," Sorrelpaw spat. "So we meet again."

Violetpaw didn't dignify this with a response. Instead, she bunched up her hind legs and kicked hard, satisfaction roaring through her as she heard Sorrelpaw's yowl of pain. As soon as the ginger she-cat was off her, Violetpaw jumped up, lashing her tail.

"What are you doing on our territory, Sorrelpaw?"

Despite her injury, Sorrelpaw still glared back at Violetpaw with the same amount of ferocity. "Only rightfully taking our revenge," she hissed. "Crowstar was promised by StarClan that in this week, Ashbird's murderer will be found and punished."

"Like this?" Violetpaw demanded, gesturing to the fighting that was going on around them. "How are you going to find the Ghost Assassin like this?"

Sorrelpaw shrugged. "ThunderClan will surrender and give the assassin up."

Fed up and properly annoyed, Violetpaw snarled, "*We don't know who it is*," before ramming back into Sorrelpaw. She gave the SkyClan apprentice a blow to the flank, before hissing, "So stay off our land!"

"Mousedung," Sorrelpaw replied, twisting to scratch at Violetpaw.

The two apprentices fell into a ball of fur, claws, and teeth, rolling around as they tried to harm the other however they could. Violetpaw felt her white fur stain with gushes of sticky, wet blood; probably both hers and Sorrelpaw's.

When they finally sprang apart, Violetpaw noticed that they'd ended up on SkyClan's side of the border. Crowstar was there, only a few steps away from her, watching the fight play out with gritted teeth. Oakbounce was battling Ravendust, and when he threw the ThunderClan warrior off him, he turned to his apprentice.

"Sorrelpaw," he called, his sharp green eyes flitting over to Violetpaw. "You okay?"

His eyes. Why did they look so familiar?

"Just about to finish off this ThunderClan apprentice," Sorrelpaw mewed simply, flicking her torn ear.

Ravendust leapt to his paws, looking over to Violetpaw, his eyes scanning over her body. The white she-cat was certain her appearance was a mess; her pelt was probably all bloody, tufts of fur missing, dirt and twigs matted on her fur. However, she managed to give Ravendust a weary smile, hoping to signal that she was okay.

Still, the black tom stepped beside her, glaring over at Sorrelpaw. "Finish her off? You don't look like you're doing too well yourself."

As Sorrelpaw's eyes zeroed in on Ravendust, she scoffed. "I remember you. Are you always around her? What are you, her sidekick?"

Ravendust's broad shoulders lifted up then down in a shrug. "I prefer to think of her as *my* sidekick, considering I'm the warrior and-"

"Ravendust," Violetpaw interrupted, "*not now.*"

From the corner of her eye, she can see ThunderClan

reinforcements rushing to the border, led by Lilystar, recognizing Frostsky and Sweetpaw among them. As she saw Sweetpaw's sharp green eyes glitter with determination, she was suddenly struck with why Oakbounce's gaze looked so familiar to her. His eyes looked like Sweetpaw's.

And, for the second time that day, Violetpaw's blood turned to ice. Why does Oakbounce's eyes look like Sweetpaw's?

"Enough talking." Sorrelpaw's snarl brought Violetpaw back into focus. "Let's finish this."

She darted forward, quick as a flash towards Violetpaw, but Ravendust was faster. With a mighty swing, he knocked the SkyClan apprentice away, and she hit the ground with a hard thump. Then, with a furious roar, Oakbounce jumped onto the black tom, and the two fell into a mess of claws.

When they stopped rolling, Oakbounce was on top of Ravendust with a murderous stare. As he raised a paw, claws unsheathed, Violetpaw's eyes widened with panic. "Ravendust!"

She darted forward, and with a great jump, aimed for Oakbounce's back. However, before she could make contact, sharp teeth grabbed her tail and yanked her backwards, pulling Violetpaw aggressively to the ground.

Snowbird.

SkyClan's infamous deputy was cackling something into Violetpaw's ear, but the white she-cat wasn't even paying attention. Her focus was fixed onto Ravendust, relief seeping through her as the black tom dodged Oakbounce's claws by no more than a mouse's tail, wiggling free a paw to send a blow to his opponent's muzzle.

It was only once Ravendust had shaken Oakbounce off of him that Violetpaw managed to turn her attention back to Snowbird. And then quickly realized that she was in a bit of trouble.

Snowbird's muzzle was scarily close to Violetpaw's. She had pinned the white she-cat down, and her pale blue eyes glowing with a bit

of craziness. "You were the liar," she hissed softly. "You got me in trouble with Crowstar. And now, you must die."

Violetpaw yelped, wiggling around, but she was exhausted, injured, and the SkyClan deputy's grip on her was tight. She watched as Snowbird lifted her claws, wincing and shutting her eyes in defeat.

Hopefully it won't hurt.

It hurt.

chapter 31

immunity

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"I'M UNTOUCHABLE!"

Violetkit frowned, coming to a screeching halt in her steps at Honeykit's words. "What?"

"I have immunity," her sister replied, flicking her tail. "I've decided."

The kits were playing a badger game, and one of the older kits, Frostkit, had volunteered to play the badger. His acting must've been really quite good, because when he cornered Honeykit and pretended like he was about to eat her, the pale ginger she-kit had curled into a ball and declared herself untouchable.

"Honeykit, he's not actually a badger," Whitekit, Frostkit's sister, mewed. "He's just pretending."

Frostkit shrugged easily. "My pretending's just that good." He then patted Honeykit on the head with his tail. "Sorry, Honeykit, didn't mean to scare you."

As Honeykit nodded, a little embarrassed, and climbed to her paws, Violetkit turned to Swankit, only to find that her best friend's eyes looked glazed over.

"Swankit? You okay?"

"Hmm? Oh." The pale gray she-kit tore her eyes away from Frostkit. "Yeah."

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VIOLETPAW SNAPPED AWAKE.

She was alive. How was she alive? Didn't Snowbird kill her?

She was in the medicine den, though it took much longer for her to realize that and regain her bearings than the last time she was in here. The smell of blood lathered her tongue, her head was dizzy and pounding, and there was some weird, sticky poultice all over her fur.

When everything finally came back into focus, Violetpaw noticed she wasn't the only one in here. Several of her Clanmates lay in nests beside hers, cobwebs pressed to their pelts. At the sight of this, anger began to rise in Violetpaw's stomach.

All this, over the Ghost Assassin. SkyClan wasn't going to stop until they got him.

That reminds Violetpaw: Honeykit.

The white she-cat winced, laying her chin on her paws as her mind whirled. Honeykit was the one behind all this. Sunbounce and Violetdust's supposed angel of a sister. But how? Why?

No. That wasn't the important part. The important part was how Violetpaw was going to stop her, stop all this harm. Even if she managed to catch the Ghost Assassin, who's to say Honeykit won't simply breed another one? Keep whispering things in Crowstar's ear to fuel his hatred? She has to end it at the source.

But then, from the depths of Violetdust's memories, Violetpaw recalled a snippet of her dream.

"I'm untouchable!"

Honeykit had chanted this, and it felt like she was speaking directly to Violetpaw with that statement. Honeykit was a spirit. Already dead. How was Violetpaw going to stop her?

It took the white she-cat a few heartbeats, and when she finally came up with an answer, her stomach felt heavy. But it was the only way, she knew it was the only way.

She had to die.

Violetpaw was scared. But, as she told herself, she'd already lived a life as Violetdust, then one as Violetpaw. That was plenty - more than Honeykit got, at the very least. She'd risked her life before to get Blossomsky catmint, and now she was going to do it again for her friends and family.

She wouldn't be gone forever, she tried convincing herself. She could still watch over her Clanmates.

The thought was meant to be comforting, but it nauseated her. She would never become a warrior with Sweetpaw. She'd have to watch her sister do it alone, watch Brightpaw and Ravendust become mates, watch everyone have kits and grow old together.

The thought of a miniature Brightpaw and Ravendust running around made Violetpaw sick to her core.

Great StarClan, no wonder Honeykit was so bitter.

Suddenly, a sharp, angry voice from outside the den caught Violetpaw's attention. Sunbounce. Slowly - even though she knew well that she wasn't supposed to - the white she-cat pushed herself to her paws. Ignoring her dizzying headache and sharp pains, Violetpaw inched for the medicine den's entrance, propping herself up against the wall to listen.

It was moonhigh, and there was a Clan meeting. Lilystar was sitting atop the Highledge, looking as old and tired as ever. Russetfrost's face was stoic beside her, and the Clan - though bruised and battered - had a fiery buzz about them.

"My apprentice is laying in the medicine den right now, barely alive," Sunbounce was spitting. "My kin could've been killed in that fight - SkyClan was looking to *kill*."

"Sunbounce-" Blossomsky mewed, a fruitless attempt to calm him down.

"So whoever's the Ghost Assassin, just give yourself up," the ginger tom hissed. "Just give yourself up so all this can end."

Worried murmurs started to seep throughout the Clan, and cats

began to look at each other with suspicious eyes. It wasn't until Lilystar spoke that everyone fell silent.

"Sunbounce, stop with these ridiculous accusations at once," the ThunderClan leader snapped. "You don't even know for sure if there's a Ghost Assassin, there hasn't been any attacks since Violetdust. And how are you so quick to trust Crowstar's *dreams*?"

"All I'm doing is looking at the facts in front of me," Sunbounce replied, "and as far as I know, SkyClan won't stop until they have someone."

Lilystar shook her head, flicking her tail as she turned the subject. "Well, we must respond to this attack. Russetfrost, please go around and create patrols out of any cats that don't need Featherpool's immediate attention. We will attack SkyClan while they're weak, and put an end to this once and for all."

No, that won't work, Violetpaw thought as she watched Russetfrost organize the patrols, feeling helpless. *That will only cost more lives. The only way to end this is to end Honeykit.*

"Everyone, get some prey," Lilystar mewed, flicking her ears to dismiss the meeting. "We will set out at dawn."

As cats dispersed, Violetpaw caught sight of Ravendust's black pelt. Before she knew what she was doing, she moved towards him, only to stop when she spotted Brightpaw standing beside him, murmuring something as Ravendust twitched his ear in acknowledgement. They were having a private moment, she shouldn't disturb them.

Just then, Ravendust looked up, his yellow gaze meeting hers. Quickly, Violetpaw spun around, feeling as though she'd been caught spying. She wanted nothing more than to scurry back to the medicine den but, when she turned, she realized there was a cat standing right in front of her: Eaglefrost.

She had spoken to Eaglefrost here and there, but certainly not as much as she had when she was younger. And, oddly, she hadn't even *noticed*. Before, she would've been trying to talk to Eaglefrost

every chance she got and now here he was, standing in front of her, and she felt... nothing.

"Eaglefrost," Violetpaw greeted, flicking her tail. "Hello."

Eaglefrost looked at her, his blue eyes kind as always. "Violetpaw, you're injured. Here, let me help you get back to the medicine den-"

"Are you out of your mind?"

This familiar voice came from behind the white she-cat, and when she glanced over her shoulder, she spotted Ravendust storming over, Brightpaw on his tail.

"Why are you out of the medicine den?" Ravendust demanded, twitching his pelt. "You're lucky Frostsky pushed Snowbird over - Featherpool said she just missed your throat. Are you trying to almost die *again*?"

Eaglefrost stiffened a little at Ravendust's presence. "I was just about to escort her over, Ravendust."

The black tom's eyes flashed. "What, is she suddenly incapable of walking by herself?"

"No, I'm fine, I'm fine," Violetpaw broke in, because she suddenly felt quite afraid that Eaglefrost and Ravendust may take a go at each other. "I just- I woke up and I heard yelling and I wanted to listen in, that's all."

"Great, Sweetpaw will be delighted to hear that you're okay," Brightpaw mewed, giving her a tight smile before looking up at Ravendust. "Ravendust, would you like to share a rabbit with me?"

The black tom blinked, looking from Violetpaw to Eaglefrost. "Yeah, okay," he mumbled over to Brightpaw. "You want anything?"

It took Violetpaw a second to realize that he was addressing her. "No, I'm alright."

He nodded, and as soon as he and Brightpaw were gone, Violetpaw turned towards Eaglefrost.

"I'm okay, you don't need to walk me over."

The brown tom frowned. "Are you sure? It's no trouble-"

"No, it's okay, really," Violetpaw insisted. "You should go get something to eat before the big battle."

Hesitantly, Eaglefrost flicked his tail in acknowledgment and padded away too, and Violetpaw started to limp her way back over to the medicine den. Unbeknownst to her, as Ravendust watched her make this trip alone, a small smile flickered onto his face.

chapter 32

the raven

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IT WAS DAWN.

Violetpaw had hardly slept a wink last night. Her mind had whirled as she created today's plan and, other than for a brief stint where Stormbird visited her (she had no clue what to say to him) and she pretended to be asleep, she'd hardly even closed her eyes.

She can hear the warriors now, whispering as they gather into their patrols, ready to set off to SkyClan's camp. Somewhere near the back of the den came Featherpool's snores; the medicine cat was exhausted after staying up all night addressing wound after wound.

Once all the patrols had left, Violetpaw pushed herself to her paws shakily. This all ends today. Honeykit ends today.

There were a few warriors guarding the camp, and among them, she noticed, was Ravendust. The black tom was sitting beneath the Highledge, looking antsy and tense, flicking his ears every few seconds. When he spotted Violetpaw standing at the medicine den's entrance, his eyes instantly narrowed with fiery disapproval, but there was hardly a second before he was on his paws and padding over.

Huh. Maybe she could get him to kill her.

"Why do you insist on leaving the nest before you're healed?" Ravendust demanded as he neared. "Have you got some condition where you can't lay still for a single moment?"

Violetpaw shrugged, gesturing to the forest. "Why aren't you out there?"

Ravendust paused, then nodded at his leg. He had a large gash
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there, wrapped a little messily with cobwebs, blood seeping through the bandage. Violetpaw winced, feeling guilty for not noticing it last night.

"Oh. Are you-" She paused, the words feeling strange and foreign in the fact that she's addressing Ravendust. "Are you alright?"

He twitched his pelt, clearly caught off guard by her question. "It's no big deal."

"Oh. Okay. Good." Violetpaw looked around, searching for something to say. What could she say?

She'd been thinking all night about... everything. Today was the day she was going to end her life and deal with Honeykit. What does she say to Ravendust now? Tell him her plan? Tell him about the Ghost Assassin?

She didn't have a plan for this, for what to say to him. All she knew was that she couldn't just go off to StarClan without saying anything. Not while he was right here.

So, she settled for something simpler, something she wanted to tell him before the day's end.

"Ravendust, I think I like you."

She came to realize this only as she spoke. Violetpaw had never thought about it before, thought about it fully - to her, Ravendust was Brightpaw's. But she couldn't help it, and as the words came out, she felt fully that they were true.

She liked Ravendust.

Great StarClan, who would've guessed?

The words came tumbling out of Violetpaw's mouth in a quick spurt, and she was suddenly grasped with the fear that Ravendust would laugh at her.

But he didn't. Instead, his ears stood up on his head, his eyes gleaming with surprise. "You think you what?"

For a moment, Violetpaw was worried that her words had gotten all mixed together and she'd have to repeat herself. But then, she caught the teasing twinkle in Ravendust's eye, and the white she-cat scowled.

"You mousebrain, I know you heard me."

"I heard something, but it was a little muffled at the end," Ravendust mewed, a hint of a smile on his face. "Can you say it again, please? Slower, and a little more enunciated."

Great StarClan, Violetpaw thought, glaring at him with flustered frustration. *Why do I even like this tom?*

But then, his hint of a smile broke out into a full one before he quickly retracted it to his serious face, and the white she-cat's heart skipped a beat.

I need help, she thought as she repeated herself.

"Ravendust, I think that I like you," she mewed, before muttering, "though I really can't imagine why-"

"Did you say *think*?" the black tom interrupted, still teasing. "You *think* you like me?"

Violetpaw flushed. "Fine, I *know*. Now shut up."

Ravendust tilted his head, and perhaps Violetpaw was mistaken, but she swore there was a certain fondness in his actions. "Well, aren't you just the smoothest talker?"

The white she-cat ignored him. "I just wanted to say that. And, er, now that you know, I'm going to go-"

"Oh, come on now, you can't just say that then walk away. You're not off the hook yet." Ravendust grinned, darting around to block Violetpaw's path - though slower than he normally would've moved due to his leg. "What do you like about me?"

Violetpaw rolled her eyes. "No way-"

"My charming personality? My ruggedly good looks?" he mewed.

Violetpaw thought about it. She thought about how much comfort she'd found in him during their time in SkyClan's camp. She remembered how safe she'd felt in enemy lands, knowing that he was going to try his hardest to get both of them home alive.

And, no matter how much she'd denied or pushed it away before, they were friends. He knows as much about her as Sweetpaw does, and they always seemed to wind up interacting somehow, even when they fought against it.

But most importantly, no matter how much they bickered, Violetpaw always felt certain that Ravendust would have her back. There was a certain strong, reliable loyalty about him that made her completely relaxed. No matter what happened, he would take care of her.

Or no- not her. Violetpaw's ears twitched a little as she remembered that she didn't have a future with him. No, it was Brightpaw he'd watch over.

Then, realizing that Ravendust was still waiting for an answer, the white she-cat tried putting everything she'd just thought into words.

"Well, er, you're hardworking and smart and surprisingly funny and-"

"Surprisingly?" Ravendust broke in. Despite targeting that one word - clearly just because he enjoyed seeing her struggle - he seemed to understand what Violetpaw was actually thinking and poorly communicating, as his eyes seemed to round with a certain softness.

The white she-cat ignored him, plunging on. "And Brightpaw is a very lucky cat."

And instantly, just like that, Ravendust's face twisted. "*Brightpaw?*"

Violetpaw nodded awkwardly, suddenly too shy to meet his eyes. "Yup. You know, you like her, she likes you, and now you two can grow up and have Brightkit and Ravenkit the Second."

She was rambling. She unfortunately does that when she gets nervous.

Ravendust looked more confused than ever. "Violetpaw, what in the world?" He shook his head. "Come on, I thought you knew. It's not Brightpaw-"

And very quickly, Violetpaw interrupted him. All she had wanted to do was to confess to him simply because of her plan to go off to the spirit realms - she would've never had the guts to do this if she had to face him tomorrow. She'd fully expected him to laugh her off, and then she would die. Simple as that.

If he was about to tell her he liked her as well... That would make this entire thing more complicated. She didn't want to hear it.

"I have to make dirt."

That didn't clear up the lost expression Ravendust was wearing. "Violetpaw- what?"

"Dirt. I have to make dirt." She cleared her throat awkwardly. "If you'll excuse me."

Without another word, she turned sharply and marched over to the dirt tunnel, a very puzzled Ravendust staring after her. Once she entered, in the darkness of the tunnel, away from anyone's eyes, Violetpaw took a deep breath.

She stared at the tunnel's opening, flexing her paws as she urged herself to move out into the woods. She has to do this.

"Come on, now or never," she whispered to herself.

Then, she sprinted out of the tunnel and into the forest.

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not a huge fan of this chapter, i feel like violetpaw & ravendust's confessions might be a little rushed? and are just awful imo lmao, i wrote this chapter around the same time i wrote viperfoot & frozenlight's confession scene in anemone and was just so through
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with it. definitely not my strong suit haha

anyhow i just wanted to get this out because this book is pretty close to finishing!! and i don't really know how else to rewrite it lmao

have an amazing day, and thank you for reading!

~ lily

chapter 33

sister, sister

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IT WAS BLOODY.

SkyClan's camp was in an uproar when Violetpaw arrived, exhausted and dizzy. Everywhere she looked, there were cats fighting, a mess of teeth and claws and fur. Lilystar was to her right, locked in a fight with Redsky and Treefrost. And there was Frostsky, forcing a SkyClan cat into a rear as Swanfrost attacked the stomach.

And the cat Violetpaw was searching for: Snowbird. She was taking two cats on by herself, dancing around Stormbird and Sweetpaw.

Without a second thought, Violetpaw charged towards them.

"Violetpaw!" Sweetpaw's mew of shock rang in the white she-cat's ears as she approached. "Great StarClan, what are you doing out here?"

Snowbird's head whipped to face Violetpaw, a murderous look in her blue eyes. "So you survived," she hissed lowly.

Stormbird seemed to realize what was happening. His ears stood up, but it was too late. The SkyClan deputy had already sprang on Violetpaw, her claws sinking into the apprentice's pelt, and Violetpaw just let it happen.

She heard Sweetpaw screech her name. She heard her parents' yowls of horror. And then, through it all, she heard Stormbird's whisper, a low, broken, "*Violetdust.*"

And then, just like that, Violetpaw of ThunderClan died.

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"I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU."

Honeykit's voice was sweet as Violetpaw slowly gained consciousness. She was laying in a meadow, a soft breeze blowing over her, carrying the beautiful melody of birds. It was warm, and the smell of prey was thick in the air, making Violetpaw's mouth water.

And there, in the distance, was Honeykit. A pale ginger she-kit with one amber and one blue eye. She smelled like flowers, and once she neared, she nuzzled Violetpaw with her nose.

Attack her, Violetpaw's mind whispered.

Yes, she should. That was what she was here to do. But now, seeing Honeykit in front of her, Violetpaw had no clue how she was meant to do that. She was a *kit.* An angelic kit who was her sister.

"So, Violetdust, we meet at last." Honeykit pulled away with a smile.

There was something about that that ticked Violetpaw off. Being called Violetdust. All her life, when someone would say Violetdust's name, she'd felt a connection; but now, when Honeykit said it, it felt like a threat. A threat that brought a certain sense of agitation to Violetpaw, and she twitched her tail-tip.

But still, she didn't move. "At last?" she croaked out instead, watching Honeykit intently. "What do you mean? If I'm Violetdust, then we've met before."

Honeykit giggled. "Yes, well, not like this. We only knew each other as kits. I never got to become an apprentice or warrior with you and Sunbounce, did I?"

"No-"

"You'll understand how frustrating it is when you see Sweetpaw become a warrior." Honeykit paused. "Only, except, she's not your *real* sister."

Violetpaw let those words sink in. She was struck very suddenly

with the reality that she had one paw in each spirit. Sweetpaw, not her real sister?

"Our parents became very depressed, Violetdust, don't you remember?" Honeykit continued, not seeming to notice the white she-cat's pause. "Don't you remember feeling rather neglected as you grew? All because it was *written in the stars for me to die as a kit.*" She growled the last part out, before her voice turned syrupy again. "That was cruel of StarClan, wasn't it? Don't you remember how you hated them? I'm making StarClan go away."

The white she-cat shook her head, trying to wrap her mind around everything Honeykit was saying. "You're making them go away?"

"StarClan thinks they're all powerful, but they're not. They think they can do whatever they want, but they can't. They only exist because the living cats remember them," Honeykit mewed, her voice beginning to grow to a hiss. "And now that I've blocked their access with the Clans, soon, they'll all be forgotten."

"Honeykit, that's *stupid*," Violetpaw meowed immediately. "If they're forgotten, you'll be forgotten too."

The pale ginger she-kit shrugged. "Well, I'm working on a solution for that now."

"A solution-?"

"Don't you remember from long ago, when a dead spirit went into a ThunderClan leader's body?" Honeykit mewed. "I'm sure we could pull something like that off. I could get Sweetpaw, perhaps. Then we could be sisters again."

Violetpaw didn't have a clue what Honeykit was talking about, but as soon as she heard Sweetpaw's name, her fur bristled, and her lips pulled back into a snarl. "You leave Sweetpaw alone."

"Ooh! Protective," Honeykit cooed. "I wonder if you would've cared for me like that *if I hadn't died.*"

"Honeykit, stop all this-"

"Why should I?" she challenged. "StarClan took *everything* from me. I'm only taking it back."

Violetpaw took a shaky breath. The cat standing in front of her right now wasn't a kit. She was a revengeful, hateful cat. But she was still Violetpaw's *sister*.

Then, suddenly, a thought struck the white she-cat. She looked around at the paradise she was in - how could such a revengeful, hateful cat be in StarClan?

Then, very slowly, she spoke. "Honeykit, where are we right now?"

Honeykit giggled. And, just like that, the paradise faded. The beautiful oak trees turned into slimy, shadowy pieces of wood; the grass faded into sticky mud; the sky was black. "Why, the Dark Forest, of course."

Violetpaw gulped, looking around nervously. "The- The Dark Forest?"

"I brought you here," Honeykit mewed with a grin. "I started out in StarClan, of course, but it was awfully boring. They could only see the good stuff. Then, the angrier and angrier I got, the more *bad stuff* I could see, until the good was simply... gone.

"Eventually, I got to see who killed Ashbird. Poor cat's been wandering between the Dark Forest and StarClan for *ages*. I suppose there were already some forces at work to make sure she couldn't leak her killer's name." Honeykit shrugged. "Of course, I used this to my advantage."

The white she-cat took a step back, gasping. "The Ghost Assassin. You-"

"Oh, Violetdust, don't be too harsh on him," Honeykit mewed insincerely. "He was just scared of losing all that he had. I imagine he grew up to be a very respectable warrior."

"You *imagine*?"

"I can't see the good stuff anymore, remember? Try to keep up."

Violetpaw shook her head. "I don't understand. If the Ghost Assassin does your bidding, then why would you tell Crowstar he's a ThunderClan cat?"

Honeykit sighed deeply. "Oh, Violetdust, I can't say. Otherwise you might think I'm an evil cat. But I'm not, not really. I'm only doing what I need to get what I want." Then suddenly, she grinned. "Ooh, but how about I show you instead?"

Before Violetpaw knew what she was doing, she was standing up and following Honeykit. Her pelt tingled uncomfortably with each step, and all the way, her brain yelled at her to jump at Honeykit, but her paws refused to obey.

Finally, the pale ginger she-kit halted in front of a murky pool of water, and leaned forward to touch it with her nose. Suddenly, an image appeared. Violetpaw squinted, leaning forward to get a better look, before she gasped, jerking backwards.

"That's me."

It was her. Her dead body, with Sweetpaw and Swanfrost crouched over it. Snowbird was laying on the ground a little bit away, unmoving, and Frostsky's claws were bloody.

"Indeed it is. And here..." Honeykit touched her paws to the water's surface, and the scene rippled away to show Lilystar. "This should answer your question."

Lilystar was cornered by Redsky and Treefrost. She was snarling, bleeding, and it was clear that she couldn't defeat the two of them alone. It was quick; the two toms don't even seem to realize that they've killed her. They jumped on the ThunderClan leader, yowling for her surrender, but before long, the tortoiseshell she-cat had stopped moving.

Violetpaw watched, aghast, as her leader's spirit left her body.

"There you have it," Honeykit whispered. "The Ghost Assassin wasn't performing his duties as I pleased. So, I needed a new way to get a body. War seemed like the best option."

The white she-cat listened to all of this numbly. Honeykit was... well, she was *crazy*. Still, she'd made no move to attack Honeykit, not until the pale ginger she-kit spoke again.

"I'm hoping the next cat to go will be Sweetpaw, while she's grieving over you. Then we could be sisters again, hmm?"

That did it. Violetpaw's muscles twitched, and before she realized it, she'd turned and sent a blow towards Honeykit's face.

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and there we have honeykit!! let me know what you guys think of this chapter, and i have a quick question that i'd like your opinions on! for the next chapter, do you want a long fight scene, or just keep it short? i'm good with it either way, and i'm having trouble deciding, so let me know what you'd prefer to read!

alright, that's all, have an amazing day! bye!

~ lily
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chapter 34

bloodline

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A SHARP LINE OF RED drew across Honeykit's cheek, and the pale ginger she-kit shrank in pain. Almost instantly, Violetpaw froze, guilt flashing through her as her sister's blood glinted on her claws.

"What are you *doing*?" Honeykit hissed once she recovered, lashing her tail. "I'm your sister!"

Violetpaw's jaws opened then closed, shaking a little. Honeykit was right. But, "So is Sweetpaw."

The kit glared at her. "She's not your real sister! Your loyalty should be to *me*!"

"Loyalty?" Violetpaw's mouth felt dry. "When I was Violetdust, you had the Ghost Assassin kill me."

"He wasn't supposed to kill *you*," Honeykit spat. "He was supposed to kill Swanfrost. You and her were just like sisters, I thought it'd be a good idea for me to take her body. Only the stupid tom couldn't follow proper instructions-"

"You're awful," Violetpaw interrupted lowly. "There's a reason you're here in the Dark Forest, and I'm going to stop you."

Honeykit rolled her eyes. "*Stop me?*" she crowed. "Stop me how? What, are you going to kill me or something?"

Violetpaw steadily met Honeykit's eyes and twitched her pelt. "If I have to."

The pale ginger she-kit flicked her tail, looking far from intimidated. "You can't kill me," she hissed. "You won't. Think of our parents."
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Violetpaw did. She thought of Blossomsky and Russetfrost, old and forever loyal to ThunderClan. Then she thought of Swanfrost and Frostsky, of their broken expressions as they huddled around her dead body. Anger flickered through her.

"Watch me," she snarled.

Then, without wasting another moment, she jumped onto Honeykit.

As her claws sank into Honeykit's pelt, the pale ginger she-kit screeched in pain. Again and again, guilt flashed through Violetpaw, and her grip loosened, just slightly.

But that was all Honeykit needed. She wiggled and squirmed this way and that, sending a hefty kick to Violetpaw's chin. This broke the white she-cat's hold, and Honeykit scrambled away, crimson dripping from her pelt.

"You're crazy!" she yowled at Violetpaw, sprinting away into the dark trees.

Violetpaw chased. The mud felt heavier and slipperier than normal mud, and as Honeykit's pelt danced between the shadows, Violetpaw felt thankful that Honeykit's fur color was red. The kit was much faster than the ThunderClan apprentice would've predicted, and should her pelt be any darker, Violetpaw would've lost her.

"Help me!" came Honeykit's voice suddenly. "Help, please!"

It took a heartbeat for Violetpaw to realize who she was calling to, and when she did, she flinched. She hadn't noticed them before, but there were other cats in the shadows of the Dark Forest, some more faded than others. None of them seemed to have much interest in helping Honeykit (in fact, one of them snapped at Honeykit's heels, grinning as she yelped). The rest simply watched numbly as the two sped by.

The Dark Forest was the Dark Forest, after all.

The chase seemed to last *forever*. It soon became evidently clear to

Violetpaw that she couldn't catch Honeykit on the ground, and as she looked around at the trees around them, an idea popped into her mind.

Quickly, she halted, mud spraying all over her as she did so, leaping onto the nearest tree and pulling herself up. She kept a careful eye on Honeykit's red pelt as she scaled up the tree, the mud blending her white pelt in with the bark.

Honeykit was still running, and once Violetpaw got to the top branch, she stared nervously at the branch of the next tree, eyeing the long distance to the ground. If she should fall...

Come on, she snapped at herself. *If that Sorrelpaw can do it, why can't I?*

Taking a deep breath, she leaped to the next branch. It shook a little under her weight, but she quickly scrambled towards the trunk, then jumped to the next branch, and the next, following Honeykit as the pale ginger she-kit ran on the muddy ground.

After some time of this, Honeykit glanced behind her, panting. Seeing no Violetpaw, she slowed to a stop, crimson coating her pelt.

"That stupid cat," she hissed to nobody in particular. "That stupid, ungrateful cat!"

Little did she know, Violetpaw was crouched on the tree branch above her, ears twitching as she listened to Honeykit.

"What kind of cat attacks and tries to kill her sister?" Honeykit continued to spit. "She's clearly just jealous, because Mom and Dad like me the most."

Violetpaw rolled her eyes. This kit is in over her head. Immature, narcissistic, and dangerous.

"If she doesn't care, then fine. I'll just take her body, and let her stay stuck here in the Dark Forest-"

This did it. Violetpaw sprang off the branch, falling through the air and landing squarely on Honeykit's body. This time, her grip stayed

firm and strong, lashing her tail as the pale ginger she-kit squirmed around.

"Violetdust!" Honeykit squeaked.

Oh, how Violetpaw hated that. Hated Honeykit calling her Violetdust. Her grip tightened.

"Come on, let me go, *please*?" Honeykit blinked up at Violetpaw with sweet eyes.

"Why? So you can take my body and leave me here?" The ThunderClan apprentice scoffed. "I don't think so."

She raised a paw, her claws dark in the moonless night. Panic flashed through Honeykit's eyes.

"Come on, put that paw down. You're not going to kill me."

Violetpaw twitched her pelt. "Why not?"

"Because you *can't* kill me." Honeykit lifted her chin. "You haven't got the guts. I'm your sister."

The white she-cat thought about this. Honeykit kept referencing her old life as Violetdust. Violetdust, perhaps, wouldn't have the guts to kill Honeykit. But Violetpaw wasn't Violetdust any more.

She had a new life now, with Sweetpaw and her parents and Ravendust. She had to put an end to Honeykit, once and for all, to live that life in peace.

Lowly, she hissed, "*Sweetpaw's* my sister," before bringing her paw down on Honeykit's tiny body.

A crack.

The pale ginger she-kit went limp, and slowly, Violetpaw released her, stepping off and back. Her breathing felt heavy as she stared at Honeykit's once again dead body, watching as it shimmered, faded, then disappeared.

Her job was done.

Darkness enveloped her, and the white she-cat looked this way and that, suddenly feeling very trapped in the shadowy trees. What now? Was she going to stay here forever, until she faded away as well?

Violetpaw curled herself into a ball, the mud seeping into her pelt. Her mind flitted to Sweetpaw, then Ravendust. Did he know she was dead?

As she prepared herself to accept the awful, hard fact that she was very likely stuck here, a familiar voice suddenly echoed around her.

"Violetpaw."

The white she-cat's head snapped up, ears twitching with hope. She recognized that voice. "Featherpool?"

The sky shimmered, and suddenly, ThunderClan's medicine cat appeared. She floated from the air down to the ground by Violetpaw, giving the white she-cat a kind smile.

"How are you here?" Violetpaw mewed numbly. "I- I thought-"

"When you killed Honeykit, the barrier between StarClan and the living world broke. StarClan summoned me," Featherpool explained gently. "Now, ready to go?"

Violetpaw blinked up at her, puzzled. "Go? Go where?"

"Certainly you're not going to stay *here*," Featherpool mewed. Her eyes twinkled. "You still have the Ghost Assassin to catch, after all."

~~~

ack finally an update!! so so sorry about not updating, midterms really took up a lot of time then i lost motivation for writing haha. i really do want to see this book to its end though! if any of you guys are still around that's amazing <3

anyways, have an amazing day/night!
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~ lily

chapter 35

guess who

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STARCLAN WAS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE. Heaven was the only way Violetpaw could think of to describe it. The weather was warm, the scent of prey was thick, and there seemed to be a forever echo of laughter in the air.

Featherpool led Violetpaw through some sort of portal from the Dark Forest to StarClan, then wordlessly padded over to a group of cats with starry pelts standing around a clear pool of water. Violetpaw made a move to follow her but before she could, a ginger-and-white tom stepped in her way. It took her a second to recognize him because she wasn't used to seeing him *dead*, but when she did, her ears stood up in shock.

"Russetfrost."

ThunderClan's late deputy blinked at her stoically. He must've died sometime during the battle, similar to Lilystar. "You're Violetdust?" His voice came out in a deep rumble. "You're my daughter?"

Violetpaw's jaws opened and closed as she searched for a response. "I used to be," she answered slowly. "I'm Violetpaw now."

Russetfrost's pelt twitched at this, then he nodded. "Thank you."

The white she-cat tilted her head with confusion. "For what?"

"For the catmint that saved Blossomsky's life. And for Honeykit." He inhaled sharply. "I know that must've been hard. It takes... an extraordinary amount of bravery to do something like that."

Violetpaw only stood there as he spoke, soaking in his praise. Though she was no longer Violetdust, it was undeniable that after years of Russetfrost and Blossomsky's lack of attention towards their
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living kits, Russetfrost's words were healing whatever part of Violetdust was left inside her.

The ginger-and-white tom flicked his tail. "You have a long life ahead of you yet. Say hello to Blossomsky for me when you get back, will you?"

Violetpaw gave him a smile. "Sure," she murmured, before moving past him towards Featherpool.

As she neared, she scanned the faces of the cats standing with Featherpool. They all looked unfamiliar to Violetpaw. All except one.

Lilystar gave Violetpaw a gentle smile. "Hello, Violetpaw."

"Lilystar," the white she-cat whispered, instantly dipping her head in respect.

The ThunderClan leader laughed. "Oh, there's no need for that," she mewed, before flicking her tail to gesture at the cats standing with her. "We were all just discussing how to send you back, and we think we've found a way." Her green eyes twinkled. "Ready to go home?"

~~~

DRIP, DRIP.

Water. Herbs. Lilystar, Russetfrost. StarClan. The Ghost Assassin. Honeykit. Moss. Water. Drip, drip.

Violetpaw's eyes snapped open, and she inhaled sharply, as though she'd just awoken from deep slumber. For a moment, she couldn't figure out where she was, until she realized the reason for that was because she'd never truly stepped foot in here before. She was in the warriors den.

It was raining outside. A light drizzle, but rain all the same. A beam of golden light announced to Violetpaw that it was sunset, and given the fact that the camp was strangely empty, the white she-cat assumed most cats were still at the border, fighting. She must've
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only died this morning.

"Violetpaw!"

A voice shattered the silence, and the white she-cat flinched. She hadn't realized there were other cats in here with her.

"Featherpool, come quick! Violetpaw's awake!"

Violetpaw relaxed when she recognized her mother Swanfrost's voice, but through the haziness of her brain, she was only wondering why Swanfrost wasn't leaping to her side. That question was soon answered when she turned to the direction Swanfrost's voice came from and, through the darkness, saw that the pale gray she-cat's legs were wrapped completely in cobwebs. Yet, despite this, her blue eyes were still shining with pure joy.

Violetpaw could only give Swanfrost a tiny smile. "Hi, Mom."

But before Swanfrost could reply, Featherpool had entered. The gray tabby medicine cat made quick work over to Violetpaw as Swanfrost bombarded her with questions.

"How is this possible? She was *dead*, I saw it with my own eyes."

Featherpool replied quietly as she gave Violetpaw a quick check-up. "It was StarClan's blessing."

The medicine cat and apprentice met eyes briefly as they recalled what it actually was. Lilystar was on her last life, and rather than take it for herself, she gave it to Violetpaw. And the reason she gave it to Violetpaw: to catch the Ghost Assassin.

Violetpaw had been thinking about the assassin's identity for a while now. With all the clues that'd let her to Honeykit, she unfortunately thinks that she knows who it was. There was a lump in her throat when she spoke.

"Featherpool, where's Frostsky?"

The medicine cat's eyes flashed with understanding, and she nodded slowly. "By the border still," she answered at last. "Good luck."

As she swept out of the den, Swanfrost's eyes sharpened. "What was that all about?"

Violetpaw looked left and right, pushing herself to her paws carefully. "Mom, is there anyone else in here?"

"No, it's just been me and you. Featherpool put us in here because the medicine den's overcrowded." These words were spoken quickly; Swanfrost's mind was clearly on other things. "What do you need your dad for?"

Violetpaw thought briefly about when she was a kit. The first time she'd heard about the Ghost Assassin, it was Ravendust who told her the story. The black tom had been shocked that she'd never heard of the tale, and now, Violetpaw was beginning to realize why Swanfrost had never told her it.

"You know, don't you?"

Her mother blinked. "What are you talking about?"

"Well, maybe you don't *know*. I doubt he would've ever told you. He likes his secrets, that's why he killed Ashbird."

Swanfrost stilled. "Violetpaw-"

"But you must have your suspicions. The night Ashbird and Violetdust died, he must've been with you. You must've noticed that he was gone for a long period of time." Violetpaw was speaking swiftly now, the puzzle pieces falling together in her mind. "That's why you never told me and Sweetpaw the Ghost Assassin story."

The pale gray she-cat looked away. "Sit down, Violetpaw, and calm down."

"Don't you ever wonder why he did it?" Violetpaw demanded. "He killed two cats, and you don't even care."

At this, Swanfrost's eyes whipped back to meet Violetpaw's sharply. "Your father's a good cat, Violetpaw," she hissed. "He's always done his best to do what's right for our family, for the Clan. He's a good cat."

The white she-cat blinked. Frostsky killed Ashbird to preserve his relationship with Swanfrost, so that the pale gray she-cat wouldn't know that he had a kit in SkyClan. Then, he killed Violetdust so Honeykit would keep quiet. Although Honeykit had demanded Swanfrost's death, he couldn't bring himself to do it. He must've thought that if Honeykit wanted a body to live in, Violetdust's was close enough to Swanfrost's. Little did he know Honeykit's identity.

"You're right," Violetpaw mewed at last. "But he killed your best friend, Mom."

Swanfrost only let out a breath shakily. "If anyone ever asks, Violetpaw, I will vouch that he was with me the entire night."

The two both loved each other too much.

The white she-cat nodded. "Okay. Fine." Then, she turned to the den entrance.

Swanfrost's voice grew panicked. "Where are you going?"

Violetpaw didn't even bother to turn around when she answered her. "To find Dad."

"Violetpaw," Swanfrost mewed. "Violetpaw, you get back here-"

But the white she-cat was no longer listening. With a deep breath and a flick of her tail, she bounded out into the rain.

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there we go!! the ghost assassin! i feel like pretty much everyone figured out who it was haha, i hope the story was still fun to read though!

let's say one more (?) chapter then epilogue. gosh, it's been nearly a year since i started writing this book, i'm feeling kind of sentimental now.

anyhow, thank you all so so much for reading!! have an amazing day/night!
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~ lily

chapter 36

daddy dearest

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FUNNILY ENOUGH, Violetpaw didn't get very far.

As soon as she ducked out of the den, she crashed into a firm body of black fur and tumbled backwards. Violetpaw's first instinct was to just step around the cat. That was, until she realized the cat was Ravendust.

She'd never seen Ravendust with a vulnerable expression before. Even when they were in SkyClan's camp, around her, he always kept himself cool and collected. But now, there was a cloud of worry in his eyes, with a tiny, precious glimmer of hope, one that only brightened once his eyes focused on her.

"*Violetpaw*." He spoke her name carefully, as though she were only a figment of his imagination. "You're... You're alive?"

The white she-cat recognized how weird the past day must've been for him. She confessed her feelings, disappeared through the dirt-tunnel, then was pronounced dead. She fully understood if he never wished to speak to her again, but it didn't look like that's what he wanted. So instead, she nodded slowly.

"Yeah."

Ravendust's face crumpled with relief, then he stepped forward, as though he were about to thrust his muzzle into her pelt, before coming to a sudden halt, ears twitching awkwardly. He settled for a question instead. "How-?"

"There's no time to explain," Violetpaw mewed, shaking her head. "I promise, I'll tell you everything after."

"After?" Ravendust questioned. "After what?"
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Violetpaw didn't even know how to begin explaining this. "I need to find Frostsky," she meowed. "I need to go to the border. I'll find you later, trust me."

The black tom's expression furrowed into a frown. "Violetpaw-"

"Trust me," she interrupted firmly, before darting around him and sprinting towards the camp's entrance.

"Violetpaw!" Ravendust called, but the white she-cat was already gone. And, thankfully, his injured leg prevented him from chasing after and stopping her.

Though, maybe nothing could've stopped Violetpaw at that moment. Her heartbeat was loud, thundering in her ears as she sprinted for SkyClan's borders. Rain slicked through her fur, but her paws kept a steady grip on the ground. This was it. Time to put an end to it all.

The yowls and scent of blood grew stronger, until it was overwhelming, as she neared. A set of teeth snapped at her tail, a claw snagged in her fur, but Violetpaw shook it all off, her eyes searching for Frostsky's white pelt.

And there he was, rolling around with Ferndust. The brown tabby she-cat had just pinned him down when Violetpaw darted over, shoving her off with as much strength as she could manage. The SkyClan cat tumbled away, and was soon pounced on by Leopardbounce, and Violetpaw whipped around to face Frostsky.

"Dad."

He was already staring at her, jaw agape. "Violetpaw-" He broke off, voice cracked. "How-? You were dead, Snowbird killed you. I don't understand-"

"There's no time for that," Violetpaw snapped. "Dad, I need you to be honest with me."

Slowly, Frostsky's face morphed downwards in concern. "What's wrong? Is it your mother-?"

"Are you the Ghost Assassin?"

Violetpaw's question rang heavily in the air, and despite all the roars of battle around them, the silence had never been so deafening.

Frostsky's mouth opened then closed. "Violetpaw-"

"I'll take that as a yes," the white she-cat interrupted sharply, flicking her tail. "How can you let all this happen? This whole battle, all these lives lost, they're all because of *you*."

Frostsky inhaled sharply. "Violetpaw, please understand-"

His voice was quivering as he spoke, and sympathy flashed through the white she-cat. She'd never seen her father like this before, so vulnerable. He'd always been a rock for the Clan through anything, a warrior that they could depend on. But now, here he was, begging for her understanding.

"I never meant to do it. I never did. I was just-" He shook his head. "I was just so scared."

"Scared?" Violetpaw's voice softened. "Scared of what?"

"Scared of what the Clan would say. What your mother would say."

Violetpaw tilted her head. "Cats before have had forbidden relationships."

"Maybe, but I couldn't lose Swanfrost." Frostsky's eyes were blazing. "I just couldn't. Ashbird wanted me to be involved in Oakbounce's life, and I didn't know how Swanfrost would react. How would she feel knowing that I had a kit with another she-cat, and I hadn't told her?"

Violetpaw raised an eyebrow. "So your solution was to kill Ashbird?"

"I didn't mean to. Please believe me, I never meant to," Frostsky mewed. "All I'd wanted to do that night was to put an end to it all. Figure out some way to appease Ashbird without having everyone

find out, but she wasn't willing to compromise. And then I started thinking about your mom, what her face would look like when the news came out, and before I knew it..."

The white she-cat flicked her tail. "Mom knows."

Frostsky's eyes widened. "What?"

"She knows. Or, at least, she has her suspicions." Violetpaw shifted on her paws. "She's had her suspicions all these years, but she's never stopped loving you. Not even when you killed her best friend."

Frostsky's face fell. "Violetdust was my friend too," he whispered. "But I was given the orders to kill Swanfrost, and I just couldn't-"

"I know, Dad," Violetpaw interrupted gently. "But you need to do the right thing here and turn yourself in. Put a stop to all of this."

The white tom took a deep breath and looked around. He'd hidden this secret for all these years, and maybe she was going crazy, but Violetpaw swore he looked just the littlest bit relieved. "Tell your mom I love her, okay?"

Violetpaw nodded. "She knows."

Frostsky gave Violetpaw a tiny smile. "I guess I'd better go find Crowstar-"

"Too late." A snarl came from the two ThunderClan cats' side, and before Violetpaw could process what was happening, a flash of dark gray fur appeared before her eyes as Oakbounce jumped into Frostsky.

The SkyClan tom's grip looked tight, a sort of possessed fury in his eyes as he fought with Frostsky, eventually pinning the white tom down.

"You!" he growled. "It was you!"

"Dad!" Violetpaw yowled, bounding over.

She jumped onto Oakbounce, but he shook her off easily. Nothing could get him off of Frostsky right now.

"Dad," Oakbounce mused, staring down at Frostsky. "I didn't have anyone to call *Dad* growing up. Or Mom. Because you *killed her.*"

His weight leaned on Frostsky's throat, and the ThunderClan warrior made a choked noise in response, trying his hardest to speak. "Oakbounce-"

"No! I don't care about what you have to say!"

Sorrelpaw was standing on the side, Violetpaw noticed, eyes wide. She'd overheard who the Ghost Assassin was like her mentor did, and was clearly in some state of shock.

"Oakbounce, don't do this!" Violetpaw struggled back onto her feet, the impact of hitting the ground having taken a significant amount of strength from her already weakened body. "Let him turn himself in to Crowstar, let him make things right!"

The dark gray tom hissed. "*This* is making things right!"

Violetpaw couldn't watch, but she couldn't look away. The sound of Frostsky's neck cracking was deafening, and she heard someone screaming "No!" It took a long time for her to realize that it was her.

Sorrelpaw was yowling Crowstar's name, then the Ghost Assassin's, followed quickly by Frostsky's, and Violetpaw felt the battle around her slowing as everyone's attention drew to her father. He was laying there on the ground, a trail of crimson running from his neck.

Oakbounce stepped off of Frostsky's body, but the rage from his eyes still hadn't melted. It felt like everything was moving in slow motion when he turned to face Violetpaw. She had a mother growing up, and a father - *his* father. He was furious, and closed the distance between him and her in a few, powerful steps.

His face was right in front of hers, an angry snarl, then it wasn't. Then, suddenly, Ravendust was here. The black tom had shoved Oakbounce away from Violetpaw, and was now standing in front of

the ThunderClan apprentice despite his injured back leg, lashing his tail and snarling.

He must've still followed her, only his journey was slowed due to his leg.

"Ravendust." The name fell from Violetpaw's mouth too quiet for the black tom to hear. She tried again, louder and firmer. "Ravendust."

He looked over his shoulder at her, his gaze oddly soft. "Yes?"

"It's over." It felt like the end of it all as Violetpaw watched Crowstar run towards them, surveying the scene with widened eyes. Honeykit was gone, the Ghost Assassin was dead, and grief lay heavy in her chest. "It's all over."

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and that's it! that was the last chapter of salt in the wound, not including the epilogue. i'm going to go into more detail about this in the author's note i'll write at the end, but let me just leave it at this for now: thank you guys so so much.

as always, have an amazing day!

~ lily
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epilogue

the end

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"HE *WHAT*?"

Violetsky's tail-tip twitched irritably as she stared down at the little dark gray tom-kit in front of her. He only blinked back up earnestly, seeming unaffected by his clearly furious mother.

"Dad took us out for a walk in the woods!" Smokekit chirped cheerfully. "He showed us the beach, and SkyClan's borders, and-"

"Smokekit, Dad said we're not supposed to tell Mom," Lilykit, a white she-kit, interrupted loudly. "He said we're supposed to pretend we're spies and to not disclose any information."

Smokekit looked confused. "I haven't disclosed any information."

His sister rolled her eyes. "You'd make for an awful spy."

Violetsky took a deep breath and scanned the camp, her eyes zeroing in on a black tom standing below the Highledge, speaking with Stormstar. As though he could feel her gaze, Ravendust glanced away from the ThunderClan leader to meet Violetsky's eyes; it only took him a second to spot the kits, realize what must've happened, and wince.

"Go play with Dawnkit and her brothers," Violetsky mewed, giving Smokekit and Lilykit a gentle push to where Brightpool was sitting with her kits. "I'll be right over."

The kits, sensing nothing wrong, only shrugged happily and ran away. The white she-cat watched them go, and before long, she felt someone approach her. She knew who it was, she didn't have to turn around. She could recognize him from the sound of his pawsteps, his scent, the little happy tingle she gets when he nears
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her.

"I love Smokekit, but that one would make for an awful spy."

Violetsky turned to face her mate, rolling her eyes - albeit without any edge. "What were you doing, taking them out of camp? When did this even happen?"

Ravendust twitched his pelt nervously, as though he were a kit getting scolded by his mother. "Well, you were napping yesterday, and the kits were bored, so-"

"So you took them out of camp?" the white she-cat demanded. "Ravendust, that's against the rules!"

Ravendust shrugged. "That's hardly a rule. Every kit sneaks out of camp. Wouldn't you rather they do it while I'm watching them than on their own?"

Violetsky sighed exasperatedly, before a small smile twitched onto her face. He had a point. "How'd you get out? Through the dirt-tunnel?"

That was meant as a joke - Ravendust's a warrior now, sneaking out of camp via dirt-tunnel should be well beneath him - but he nodded seriously. "Of course. It's part of the experience."

The smile widened as Violetsky laughed to herself, picturing her mate crouching through the dirt-tunnel and crawling out as though he were an apprentice. Her whiskers twitched with amusement and she leaned into his pelt, melting into his warmth contently. "How did you *ever* become a father?"

Ravendust propped his chin onto Violetsky's head. "Well, there was this cat. A little annoying, I must admit. She told me she liked me, died, then came back to life the same day."

"Well, she doesn't sound very stable," Violetsky mused back. "I'd avoid her at all costs if I were you."

The black tom hummed. "Oh, I don't know about that. She's not too bad. She's quite fun to talk to, actually. Things are always

interesting with her around. I may even grow to like her back someday."

Violetsky slapped him gently with her tail, rubbing her face deeper into his pelt. The sun was shining down on them, the laughter of kits loud in the air. Everything was peaceful, serene, and perfect.

The peace lasted for many, many more years to come. Stormstar was a good leader, governing ThunderClan wisely. After finding out that Violetsky was Violetdust reincarnated, it seemed to bring him some sort of closure, and he was able to find another mate and have kits of his own.

Same for Sunbounce. He and Whitebird had another litter, serving ThunderClan loyally until it was time for the elders den. There, he told stories of both Violetdust and Violetsky.

All of Violetsky's other friends were doing well. Brightpool got over Ravendust and, funnily enough, became mates with Eaglefrost. The two had a litter around the same time Violetsky did, and their kits are fast friends.

Sweetbird fell in love with Guststorm of WindClan, and joined WindClan to be with him. Violetsky missed her sister dearly, but still sees her at Gatherings every few moons.

Swanfrost, however, was a different story. After Frostsky died, it felt as though she'd lost a spark in her eyes. She completed her warrior duties until it was time for the elders den, but she never engaged in small talk anymore and whenever she laughed, it sounded fake.

Nobody knew where Frostsky's spirit would end up, but the chances of him being in StarClan was low. And, since Violetdust's spirit is in Violetsky's body, Swanfrost may never see her best friend or mate ever again, the two cats that'd made her feel young and alive. A dark cloud hung over her head for the rest of her life, all the way until she died.

And slowly, as the seasons changed, cats aged. Before Violetsky knew it, she and Ravendust were in the elders den. Sunbounce and Whitebird were long gone; Smokekit and Lilykit had become

Smokedust and Lilyfrost; and Stormstar was considered an old leader now, with speckles of white fur around his muzzle.

She, Ravendust, Brightpool, and Eaglefrost sat around the elders den, telling stories to any kits that wanted them and reminiscing about their young days. They were all growing older and older, and, too quickly for Violetsky's liking, Ravendust eventually reached a point where all he could do was laze around and sleep, hardly able to keep his eyes open anymore.

One night, the two were laying by the den's entrance, Violetsky leaning back into Ravendust's pelt like she always did. The black tom was curled around her, eyes shut, as she stared up at the moon and glittering stars, taking in the sight of how the camp clearing looked underneath the silver light.

It truly felt like only yesterday when she was running around with a moss ball as a kit, racing Ravendust to the camp's entrance to prove who was faster.

"Ravendust," she whispered, craning her neck to look behind her at the tom who'd been by her side for her entire life. "Ravendust."

"Hmm?" Her mate cracked open an eye tiredly.

It was time. Time for them to grow old and die, too. Yet:

"Don't go. Not tonight." Violetsky exhaled shakily, sinking deeper into his fur. "Hold on for one more night."

Ravendust gave her ears a lick. "Don't be silly," he rumbled.

She turned, meeting his yellow gaze. His eyes already seemed clouded. "I don't want to live without you."

Ravendust gave her a smile. "You've already died two times. Don't you think it's my turn now?"

"One more night," Violetsky murmured. "Please?"

He stared at her for a few heartbeats, then blinked slowly in agreement. "Okay."

And hold on he did. The next night, however, he died in his sleep, curled up beside Violetsky.

The white she-cat outlived him for a year more, during which both Brightpool and Eaglefrost left for StarClan. The night Violetsky died, she could feel it, that whatever youthfulness and life she had left in her body was slipping away. And she welcomed it.

In her entire life as Violetdust, she'd fought the idea of StarClan, retaliated against it in any way possible. But now, she couldn't be more appreciative that it was real. Ravendust was waiting for her there.

And then, for the third and final time, Violetsky of ThunderClan died.

thank you

can i ever say thank you enough?

guys, this book has genuinely been such an incredible journey for me. most of the books i write, i have it planned down to a tee. like i know exactly what's going to happen with every character, but this one, i just started writing because i saw a plot prompt and got inspired. i kid you not, when i first started this book, i had no clue who the ghost assassin was. i just made it up as i went along.

but anyways, this book has been a year long project. i always thought it was just going to be a silly little plot that i work on on the side; i never meant for it to become the longest and most popular book on my page. but hey, i'm certainly not complaining.

but with all that said, i do want to apologize that the whole ghost assassin plot isn't as intricately planned. like violetsky never really actually did any sort of investigation, all the clues were kind of handed to her, and i never really wrote out how she realized it was who it was. but nonetheless, i hope the story was enjoyable.

thank you guys for reading, for your excitement for new chapters, and any and all interactions with this story. i can't count the amount of times a comment has made me smile or laugh. truly, i never would've finished it if it wasn't for you all.

thank you, thank you, thank you.

as always, have an amazing day/night! and drink water!

~ lily